







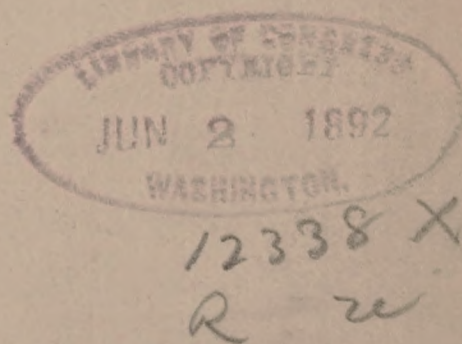
MRS. L. T. MEADE,

OUT OF THE FASHION

BY
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"POLLY, A NEW-FASHIONED GIRL," "A WORLD OF GIRLS,"
"CHILDREN OF WILTON CHASE," ETC.



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OUT OF THE FASHION.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is an old-fashioned square in a very central part of Bayswater, which, for some reason, is no longer considered a desirable place of residence by the fashionable world. It is difficult to account for the unpopularity of Rosemary Gardens, for the place combines many distinct advantages. Its situation can scarcely be surpassed; it is on high ground; its soil is gravel; its aspect bright; it is within a few minutes' walk of Kensington Gardens. Omnibuses pass its select and peaceful gates, and the Metropolitan Railway is within a stone's throw from its houses.

The place is as central and convenient as a place can be; it has also another advantage: it is quiet. Close to the war and traffic of

the great city, in one of the houses in Rosemary Gardens you may lie down and sleep without being disturbed by a sound. The houses themselves are large, well-planned, and convenient; the house-rents also are very moderate. Still the place is not popular. Many of these palatial houses stand empty; almost all bear marks of seediness and decay.

No. 80 Rosemary Gardens was, perhaps, the sole exception to the universal rule. Three or four years before this story opens it had been redecorated and lightened. White paint was substituted for dark; windows were opened in unexpected corners; delicate papers graced the walls; and flowers filled the wide, spacious balconies.

Then a family arrived, and took possession of the restored mansion. This family consisted of a father and four girls. The girls were all young, but not too young, for the youngest even had stepped out of her childhood, and, when the family took possession of No. 80, was over fourteen years of age. The eldest girl was twenty. They were

pleasant girls to look at, and their names were agreeable to say. Margaret was the name of the eldest; Kitty came next; then Betty; then Sibyl. Ross was the surname of the family. The girls were educated according to the fashion of their times. They were up-to-date girls, without being fast. They were learned, without being in any sense of the word bluestockings. They were all four of them merry, unaffected creatures, and the house had a gay time when they came into it.

Margaret was twenty at this time, and she was very glad to take the lead, and to give her sisters a good time. The girls had been motherless since Sibyl was a baby. Since then they had been under the care of many tutors and guardians. Two of them had finished their education in Germany. One had studied art in one of the best studios in Paris. Sibyl, who was by many considered the cleverest of the family, had lived with an aunt, and received her education at the nearest high school.

But now they all met in London, and Margaret found herself the mistress of a mansion.

“You shall all do exactly as you please, girls,” said their father. “Only Margaret shall be head. That is the only restriction I put upon you three younger ones. Margaret must housekeep, and in times of perplexity hers must be the casting vote.”

“Who minds that?” said Kitty, her dark eyes flashing. “Who could object to being guided by this dear, gentle old Meg of ours?”

The little conversation was taking place at the breakfast table; and Kitty, who was boisterous in her movements, upset a cup and saucer, and spilt its contents over the board, in her efforts to stretch across to Margaret to embrace her.

Mr. Ross was like his eldest daughter, quiet in his ways, and undemonstrative. He sighed gently over Kitty, and Margaret also sighed, but neither of them reproved her: it was not their way.

The little household, thus brought together, passed three or four years of uninterrupted sunshine. The girls did not go exactly into society, but they saw many friends both at home and abroad. Other girls came to the house, and other girls brought their brothers with them, and the brothers, as they got intimate, their young men friends. So that altogether life at the Rosses' was very cheerful and very young.

The house was capable in itself of receiving any amount of sunshine. The rooms, with their great balconies, and large windows, and light decoration, would reflect back light, not absorb it. And when music and song sounded in the drawing-room, and gay girls trooped out on the balconies, and laughing, cheerful sounds floated down to the streets below, the other inhabitants of Rosemary Gardens used to stop on their way home to their own dismal abodes, and wonder what had come to No. 80, and why life was so festive there.

That old story in the Bible of the years of

plenty followed by the years of famine has, to a certain extent, become typical of life, and these four girls, who looked as if no shadow could ever touch them, were not to be excepted from the universal lot. The shadow which was to darken their present brightness came on very slowly, and, strange to say, Kitty was the first to notice it.

“Margaret,” she said to her sister, one evening, “do you ever observe anything queer about father?”

The girls were standing on the balcony when she spoke. The two younger ones had gone to bed, for it was past midnight, and they were tired after a long evening devoted to the entertainment of many guests. When the last visitor had departed, however, Margaret had stepped on the balcony to cool her hot cheeks, and Kitty had followed her.

“Do you notice anything queer about father?” asked Kitty, a momentary terror filling her bright eyes, as she glanced at her sister.

“No, nothing,” replied Margaret. “What do you mean, Kit?”

“I don’t know, Maggie. I expect I am all wrong, as you have never observed anything. But he does look pale and sighs very often, and he does not eat much.”

“I have not noticed it,” replied Margaret.

“Then it must be my fancy,” answered Kitty.

She leant over the heavy iron rail of the balcony, and looked into the gardens in the middle of the square. They were commonplace gardens, with the usual tennis court—a somewhat badly-kept one—in their midst. But now the moon was beautifying the grass, and casting a strange, magic light over the stunted London trees, and Kitty, who possessed a really artistic soul, sighed for pleasure.

“I am sleepy,” she said presently. “Good-night, Meg.”

Margaret offered her cheek to be kissed, and Kitty went into the drawing-room. Margaret heard her singing the gay refrain

of a song as she tripped across the room. Margaret was not romantic, nor had her artistic tendencies been in any way developed. She looked into the moonlit garden, and was not conscious of any sense of admiration as she gazed at it. Presently she, too, went back into the drawing-room, and, closing the heavy window, bolted it across.

Margaret was a very considerate young mistress, and the servants had all, before this, gone to bed. She put out the gas, and leaving the drawing-room took up her chamber candlestick to go to her room.

As she did so Kitty's words came back to her with a painful, queer insistence.

"Father looks pale ; he sighs ; he does not eat."

"Folly !" muttered Margaret. "Surely if there was anything wrong, my father would tell me. I have noticed nothing. Well, I shall watch him to-morrow."

She went half-way up the stairs to her room, when again the memory of the teasing words came back to her. And now she saw

a picture of her father rise up quite clear and distinct before her. It was a faded picture, and gave Margaret a queer, lonely sense of something intensely pathetic.

“That little goose of a Kitty!” she said. “What has the child done to me with her morbid notions? I positively can’t rest until I see into this matter. I must go downstairs, and find out if father is still up.”

She leant over the banisters, and saw that the light was still burning in the entrance hall. Then she tripped downstairs, and a moment later was knocking at her father’s study door.

Mr. Ross bade her enter; he looked astonished when he saw her. He had been walking up and down his room, and now he stopped, and looked at Margaret in a harassed way, as if her presence distressed him. This was not at all his usual expression, but it fastened the arrow of conviction at once into Margaret’s heart. She saw that Kitty was right.

Her manner was particularly gentle as she went up to her father.

“You know you are doing very wrong,” she said. “You ought not to be up at this hour. You are tired; you are cold—your hands feel like ice.”

“I am not really tired, Maggie,” said Mr. Ross. He had quite recovered his ordinary manner now. “You cannot expect old folks never to wish to be quiet and alone. Yes, of course, it is different with you, my dear, and glad I am to think it. You can’t have too much life, and mirth, and fun. But old people don’t want to sleep as much as the young do, and in short, my dear Margaret, I like to walk up and down my study when the house is absolutely quiet. If I give you and your sisters full liberty, my dear child, it is not too much to ask you to do the same for me.”

“Then you are vexed with me for coming down,” said Margaret.

Kitty would not have said this; but then Margaret was never remarkable for tact.

"No, my dear; I am not vexed," said Mr. Ross. "You have never done anything to cause me real vexation, my dear Margaret."

Here he came over, and, bending down, kissed Margaret on her forehead.

"I think you are happy," he continued; "you and your sisters! You all seem very happy."

"Yes, father; we are perfectly happy."

"How many years have we been together in this house?"

Margaret looked up, surprised at the question.

"We have been here over four years," she said. "Sibyl was fourteen then—she is eighteen now."

"And you are twenty-four, Margaret?"

"Yes."

"You have had four happy years," said Mr. Ross. "That is something—every girl can't say that. Your mother told me she never knew perfect happiness until she was my wife. But you have all had sunny girlhoods, my dear. And then the future—a

woman has many possibilities in the future !
Now, Margaret, you have disturbed my meditations, and, as I begin to feel sleepy, I shall set you an excellent example by going to bed."

CHAPTER II.

THIS was the beginning of the shadow which, by and by, grew dark, as such heavy clouds will. This night and this conversation were the beginning of the subtle change which overthrew the household, and caused a moral earthquake, and the upheaval of all old customs.

But the shadow came on slowly, and the great crash did not occur until nearly a year after Margaret had intruded upon her father's midnight meditations.

It was early summer now again, and the four girls sat in solemn conclave. There were no visitors in the house this day, and the four had the big drawing-room to themselves.

"I can't stand it any longer," said Sibyl, who was decidedly the most spoilt member of the household. "I don't know what you mean to do, Betty, and Kitty, and Mar-

garet, but I call it immoral to go on like this."

"Yes, Sib, storm away!" said Kitty, "what's up, now? For four years we lived in this house, and had no rows, and now there are three or four a week! Go on, Sib; what has struck horror to your righteous and most moral soul?"

"Oh! I can't help it," said Sibyl. "You are unkind, Kitty. You make fun of everything; but this is no laughing matter—it isn't, really. It's about the baker."

Here Sibyl swept across the room, and, flinging herself on Margaret's neck, burst into a passion of weeping.

"I have kept it in all day," she said, "but I must let it out now, or I shall choke. And, oh! it *is* so immoral, and it's so cruel of Kitty to laugh."

"I'm not laughing any longer, Sib," said the repentant Kitty.

"Hush, darling, dry your eyes, and tell us what is the matter," whispered Betty. "It

can't be worse than the dressmaker affair of yesterday," she murmured, *sotto voce*.

Margaret did not speak at all, but she passed her arm in a wonderfully comforting way round Sibyl's slight waist.

"Now, what is it?" repeated Kitty. "Out with the grievance, Sibyl—don't keep us in suspense."

Sibyl raised her head from Margaret's breast, dashed the thunder drops from her eyes, and began emphatically:

"You don't suppose I trudged over to the Stores to fetch those horrid cakes for nothing," she said. "The children were coming, twenty of them. You know how children will eat. You know I *had* to go—I could not help myself."

"But our own baker is much nearer than the Stores," interposed Margaret gently.

Sibyl turned, and almost sprang upon her.

"That's it, Meg—that's the immorality of it—and, oh! it isn't the poor baker's fault, for he has got ten children, and an ailing

wife. I don't blame him—he has got to look after himself, of course he has.”

“I wondered why the cake I ordered did not come,” said Margaret. “I ordered a specially large one, which cook was to frost. I wondered to see all those small cakes and tarts on the table.”

“I wouldn't tell you until the party was over, Meg. You gave me leave to arrange it, and I would *not* have you worried. The fact is, Margaret, and Kitty, and Betty, the baker refused to make the cake until his bill was paid. Poor baker! And aren't we an immoral family?”

The other three girls looked at one another. They uttered no exclamations of astonishment, but they exchanged glances full of meaning. Sibyl, having delivered herself of her story, walked across the room, and hid her burning face against the velvet curtain, which cozily draped the window.

“You did bravely, Sib,” said Kitty at last. “And so you spent your own money on all those cakes and tarts! Poor, generous Sib!”

"There's my purse—it's empty!" said Sibyl.

She opened it disdainfully, and tossed it on the floor.

"Well!" said Kitty, in an emphatic voice.

Nobody echoed her "Well!" She had a brightly-colored face, and now her cheeks became damask.

"There's the butcher, too, and the dress-maker," Betty began, looking at Margaret.

"Oh, hush, Betty!" said Margaret.

It was now Kitty's turn to take up the defensive.

"Why should Betty hush?" she said.

"We have all known this thing for a long time in our hearts, and we have been afraid to speak of it. Sibyl is quite right; it's positively immoral of us to keep silence any longer. Come away from the window, and let's get each of us into our own cozy chair, and thresh the matter out. Come, Sib, you know you like the softest cushions; here you are."

"There's no manner of use," said Margaret.

"But, of course, girls, if you wish——"

“We do wish,” said Betty. “It can’t be half such a nightmare if we talk it over. Kitty is right; it’s cowardly not to face the thing. Now then, Margaret, you are the housekeeper. Be prepared for a plain question. Why don’t you pay the bills?”

“I did, till within a year ago,” answered Margaret. “Then my father told me they were all to be sent to him, and he would settle with the tradespeople.”

“Which, of course, he hasn’t done,” interrupted Sibyl.

“I’m afraid not, Sib.”

“And we have been having no end of parties, and *such* a jolly time! Why, I’ve never had so many new dresses in my life, and beauties—no expense spared. It was only a month ago father told me to go off to Mme. Wild’s, and get the very prettiest party-dress she could manufacture. I danced off with a heart like a feather, and Mme. Wild looked me in the face, and said, ‘I have written a letter to your good papa. When he answers it, you shall have my best atten-

tion, Miss Ross.' It was the insolent look on Madame's face that first opened my eyes. I came straight home, and I walked into father's study, and I said, 'Father, Mme. Wild, the dressmaker, has written you a letter, and she says she will make my dress when you answer her letter.' 'I will reply to her to-night,' answered father, in his gentle voice, and he looked up at me as if he was awfully tired. I did not say another word, and, of course, I went away quite satisfied. But I hadn't the heart to go back again to Mme. Wild. I suppose now that father never answered the letter, and that she has never been paid."

"No," said Betty, "Mme. Wild has never been paid, but I don't care so much about her. It is Mrs. Moore I am thinking of. She makes all our plain dresses, and comes here to do upholstering and all kinds of odd jobs. She came here this morning, Margaret, and she cried; yes, she did. We owe her twelve pounds, and some of the money we owe is for out-of-pocket expenses, and she is

a widow with four little children. I told her she should have her money to-morrow; and she shall, if I sell all my rings to pay her."

"Why don't you speak, Maggie?" said Kitty. "Why do you sit there, looking so white and still, with your hands clasped together? What is the matter? Has father given you no money at all during the past year?"

"A little," said Margaret slowly. "The servants' wages are not greatly overdue; that is one thing."

"What does this mean, Maggie? How is this to end?" said Sibyl. "I have some sense of honor left. Have you?"

"I hope so," said Margaret, "only I am divided. Oh! you don't understand, any of you. My father—all these are reproaches heaped on my father! Oh! you can none of you understand!"

Margaret was so reserved that her few words fell now with the force of lead on the three girls. They did not speak for a

moment; then Kitty once more came to the front.

“We simply can’t go on like this, Maggie. If you are afraid to speak to father, I will. He *must* give us money to pay these tradespeople, or—” Her lips turned white, and her eyes misty; she was looking into a queer shady country of perplexity and ruin, and the glimpse frightened her.

Margaret rose suddenly from her chair.

“Something must be done!” she said. “I have put off the evil day as long as I could, but we have got to face it. I will speak to my father to-night.”

She left the room. The three other girls looked at one another, and Kitty slowly shook her head.

“It’s going to be awfully bad!” she said. “Maggie wouldn’t look like that, nor speak in that dreadfully solemn way if the very, very worst wasn’t to be expected.”

“Well,” said Sibyl, “after to-day, and my experience with the baker, joined to my experience a month ago with regard to Mme.

Wild, I declare stoutly that I wish I was the daughter of a day laborer, for I don't believe he would be allowed to go in debt. There, get away, you horrid, fat, luxurious footstool. I hate you, for I don't believe you were paid for !”

“Kitty,” said Betty, “how much do you think my turquoise-and-pearl ring would fetch? And who will buy it from me? I can't really take it to a pawn-shop.”

Sibyl stared at her two sisters. Their conversation about the ring was not immediately interesting. She dragged a little wicker chair into the balcony and went out. She seated herself in this, and, taking a book of poems, pretended to bury herself in its contents. She read on steadily, although, of course, she was not taking in a single word. Misfortune and pain were new things in Sibyl's life, and she was holding them at bay with all the strength of her youth.

Each of the sisters had high spirits, but Sibyl's were perhaps the highest and the proudest. They were all nice-looking girls,

but Sibyl had the most distinguished face, and the most independent bearing.

“It’s immoral!” she kept on repeating, under her breath. “We ought to be living on bread and cheese. Oh! I do wish I was the daughter of a day laborer!”

CHAPTER III.

MR. ROSS was in the habit of coming home late. Margaret, therefore, as she sat in his study, and listened for the sound of his latch-key in the hall-door, was not surprised when eleven struck in a silvery chime from a carriage-clock on the mantelpiece. Twelve o'clock sounded by and by, and the young watcher, lying back in the depths of a great armchair, gave no sign or start of impatience. The fact was she was dreading the interview which lay before her, and every moment of delay was a relief.

Margaret Ross had a stronger face than her other sisters; she was the only one of her family who was decidedly dark. Her eyes were large, pathetic, and beautiful; otherwise her face was plain. She had been always a grave sort of girl, intensely reserved, and cold to strangers. Those who knew her fairly well,

however, found many points to like. She was so reliable, so honest, so sure to do her very best about everything. Those who knew her well thought there was no one in the world like Maggie, but then, very few knew her well, for it was not in her nature to let many people get a glimpse into her heart.

In the old days, when her sisters were at school, Margaret had always spent her holidays with her father; they had a great many points in common, although in some respects their characters were opposite as the poles. During these holidays they became the closest of friends, and Margaret quickly learned to give her father the very first place in her heart. He was there enthroned. Few more sacred places could be found than the heart of this good, brave girl. She could not bear to see any faults in her idol. For a whole year she had lived down her fears, refusing to allow the black, dreadful thing which was pursuing her to look her full in the face.

“Honor on one hand—my father on the

other," she kept repeating now. Her lips trembled; her feet and hands were cold.

The little clock on the mantelpiece sounded one, and now at last the latchkey was heard in the door. Maggie started to her feet, and turned on the gas. She was in white, and her dark hair was ruffled by her long vigil. She had never looked more girlish, and more nearly pretty than when she stepped into the hall to meet her father.

He started when he saw her.

"My dear child, what is wrong?" he said.

"I thought I would sit up to have a little talk with you, father," she said.

Mr. Ross put his arm round her neck, and kissed her affectionately.

"You look wonderfully young to-night, Maggie," he said in a pleasant voice.

She did not make any reply, but, taking his hand, led him into the study.

It looked cozy and bright, and Margaret had added to its attractions by placing a tempting tray of supper on a side table.

"What good angel has told you to do that,

Margaret?" said Mr. Ross. For the first time an anxious expression seemed to come into his face. He looked at the food as if he were really famishing.

"I thought you would be hungry, father. Shall I cut you some sandwiches?"

"As many as you like, my dear. The fact is, I had no time to eat dinner in town this evening. I had some very pressing calls, and was too harassed to eat. Nothing to trouble you, Maggie, only you may cut me a good lot of sandwiches. By the way, did anyone call to see me to-day?"

"I believe a good many people. I wanted to speak to you about *them*—and—other things."

"Ah, just so, my dear."

Mr. Ross opened his private secretary, and busied himself opening and shutting drawers.

"After all, I am glad you are up, Margaret. Yes, I'll take a cup of coffee. Thank you, my love. It is nice to have a kind daughter to attend on one."

He received the cup from her trembling fingers, drained it off, and helped himself instantly to another.

"I am better now," he said. "That is the good of being a small eater, Margaret. I get exhausted, and a little refreshment instantly restores me. Now I am fit for anything. Where are my messages, and letters, and telegrams, dear? I will first glance through them, and go to bed."

Margaret pointed to a salver on the center table.

"All those came to-day," she said. "That telegram arrived between eight and nine this evening."

Mr. Ross tore open the yellow envelope. Not a muscle of his face changed as he read. He crushed up the little missive after he had perused it, looked instinctively at the empty grate, but, seeing no fire there, thrust it into his pocket.

"You'd better go to bed, Margaret," he said, as he deliberately opened a letter.

"But I've sat up on purpose to speak to

you, father. Can you grant me just five minutes? I don't think I shall keep you any longer. *May* I speak to you, father?"

Mr. Ross glanced at his watch, quickly smothered an impatient sigh, and turned round to face his daughter.

"If you must, you must, Margaret," he said. "But is it so very important? We have already begun the day, and I am tired, my love."

"Oh, I won't keep you long," said Margaret. "And I—I would not hurt you. You are above all others to me—all others. Father, it's just that we can't go on any longer unless you give us some money."

Mr. Ross had looked almost terrified at the beginning of Margaret's speech, but toward the end his brow cleared.

"My dear child," he said, going up to Maggie, and putting his hand on her shoulder, "so much emotion and for so little? Surely my dear, if you wanted money you had but to ask for it?"

"I did," she began, but he interrupted her.

"You are fretting about the tradespeople," he said. "I own that I have been temporarily embarrassed, and hard up, but they shall receive checks to-morrow. If you wish it, I will write them out now."

"Oh, no, father, not while you are so tired."

Mr. Ross smiled slowly.

"Well, I think you might let me off until the morning," he said. "I don't break my word; and I promise to send out checks then. Have I a list of our creditors, Margaret?"

"Yes, in this envelope."

"Leave it on my table. I may get up early to-morrow morning to attend to the matter. And now for your own immediate wants. What do you say to this?"

He pulled a leather case out of his breast-pocket, and opening it, slowly counted into Margaret's hand ten crisp £10 Bank of England notes.

"Oh, father, if you are going to pay the

bills, I really don't want all this. You have given me one hundred pounds."

"Keep it, child. Did I not say we were going to begin on a new system? No debts, ready money paid down for everything. Your hundred pounds won't last long if you dress as I like to see you. And now, good-night, Margaret, and never again, my love, get into a tragic state of mind for the lack of money. As long as I live I hope I may keep you well supplied. Good-night Maggie, dear."

Mr. Ross pressed a prolonged kiss on his daughter's brow. An impulse made her throw one arm round his neck and return his embrace almost as fervently as Kitty would have done.

"Do go to bed soon, father, dear," she said. And then she went slowly up to her own room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning, when Margaret came downstairs, the footman handed her a thick sealed packet.

“Mr. Ross must have gone out very early this morning, miss,” he said, “for when cook came down she found the hall door on the latch; and he hasn’t been near his room, Louisa says. I found this, too, directed to you, Miss Ross, on my master’s table.”

Margaret felt that this man was staring into her face with undisguised curiosity. She drew herself up, took the packet, and answered coldly :

“I expected Mr. Ross to be absent this morning. Have breakfast served at once.”

The man withdrew, and Margaret hated herself for having told an untruth. She certainly had *not* expected her father to be away. His manner last night had soothed

her, and the hundred pounds in her pocket had given her a pleasant sense of security. She slept well, and awoke in almost good spirits. If her father had been going through a temporary embarrassment and it was over, there was no reason why they should not all be as happy as ever again. She thought how pleased Betty would be when she found she need not part with her turquoise and pearl ring, and how unnecessary it would be for Sibyl, the baby, the pet, and the rebel of the family, to speak of them any longer as immoral.

But when Margaret went downstairs, and encountered the eager, curious expression on her servants' faces, she felt her heart sinking again, and resolved to say nothing about the hundred pounds until she had opened the letter which her father had left for her.

It was a lovely morning, and the breakfast room at No. 80 was as sunshiny and cheerful as a room could be. Window-boxes filled the wide window-ledges, and the perfume of mignonette, sweet pea, and monthly roses,

floated in from the open windows, and greeted the girls as they sat down to their breakfast.

They all looked bright, and young, and cheerful, as they gathered round the table, and the servants certainly could detect no shadow of a cloud on any of their faces. Sibyl seemed in even wilder spirits than usual. She said she had got a scheme in her head, and she wanted to consult Maggie and the others.

“I thought it all out last night,” said Sibyl. “I lay awake until two o’clock, and then it was formed to perfection. After that I dropped asleep. It is a lovely scheme, and since I thought of it I don’t want to be a day-laborer’s daughter, for this will be much more interesting. Shall we all come up to the drawing-room, Maggie, and shall I tell you the lovely thing I have thought of?”

“I’ll come to the drawing-room after I have attended to the housekeeping,” said Margaret.

“Oh, the housekeeping! I don’t think we ought to have any dinner, I really don’t!”

"Hush, my dear, the servants may hear you !"

"Well, Maggie, what if they do? Let us be honest, whatever happens, say I."

"Oh, don't tease," said Kitty, putting her arms around Sibyl's waist. "Do let poor old Meg have her morning in peace. She'll come to us when she can. Now, you know about Betty's ring? She wants to consult you as well as me. Come away to her room, and let's have a consultation."

"Don't do anything about the ring without telling me first," called Margaret after the others.

They stared at her in some astonishment, but made no reply. They went slowly up to the drawing-room, and, seating themselves in a heap together on an ottoman, began to examine the contents of Betty's jewel-case. They were intently discussing the merits of different rings, when a quick step was heard on the stairs, and Maggie, with her face all aglow, and her eyes full of tears, rushed into their midst.

“Oh, girls, girls, it’s all right!” she exclaimed. “It’s all right! Look at these!”

And she tumbled a perfect sheaf of checks into Kitty’s lap.

Betty snatched one up, and began to read it out aloud.

“‘Pay Mr. John Hogg eighty-four pounds seventeen and fourpence, sterling.’ Why, Margaret, that’s the butcher! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!” she screamed.

“Oh, girls, where are my rings? Don’t let my darling rings get crushed under your feet. I need not part with them now, and I value them so much.”

“Is there any check for Mrs. Moore in this great pile, Maggie?”

“Yes, for every one,” replied Margaret. “I don’t believe when these are paid that we shall owe a farthing in the wide world.”

“Heavenly!” replied Sibyl. “I can’t realize it! I positively can’t. Don’t speak to me, any of you, girls. Let me lie back with my eyes closed, and try to comprehend the

thing. We don't owe a penny in the wide world ! Can such bliss be ours ? ”

“ And here is dear father's note,” continued Margaret. “ He says I'm to send out all these checks directly. He is obliged to go away for a couple of days on business, but he will be back by Saturday at the latest. He sends his love to you all, girls.”

Margaret half held out the note, but the other three were not particularly eager to read it. Betty and Kitty were tumbling over the checks, and reading the amounts to one another. Sibyl lay back with her eyes shut, and a happy, rested expression on her face.

Margaret put the note into her pocket.

“ I have another joyful surprise for you,” she said. “ What do you say to all these ? ”

And she pulled the banknotes out of her purse. Even Sibyl now darted up from her reclining position, and came forward.

“ Ten ten-pound notes ! ” she repeated. “ All our debts paid, and ten ten-pound notes to the good ! Maggie, did the genie of the ring visit you last night ? ”

“Father was the genie,” replied Margaret. “He gave me this money, and he said he would write checks to meet all the bills. These are the checks. I believe I was a coward, girls, not to speak to my father long ago about these difficulties.”

“But you did, Maggie; scores of times.”

“He says not. I could not have explained myself clearly.”

“And *I* went to him,” interrupted Sibyl hotly, “and I spoke out plainly enough, you may be sure. And he made me a promise, and he——”

“Hush!” interrupted Margaret. Her face had grown pale and stern. She clenched her hand vehemently over her father’s letter.

Sibyl looked up, startled. Margaret’s anger was only like a flash. It melted into sweet sunshine.

“I do feel happy,” she said. “And I cannot bear a word against my father just now. He has been embarrassed, but it is over; it is all right now. I feel as if I

could go down on my knees and thank God."

"Darling Meg!" said Kitty.

She went up to her elder sister and crushed the hand, which still held Mr. Ross's letter, in an almost painful squeeze.

"Can't we celebrate this event?" said Sibyl, "after you have consigned all those checks to the care of the post? Can't we just go off somewhere, and have a real jolly day? To Richmond, or somewhere? I don't believe I can stay indoors after this. I had a plan, but it has vanished. It is not wanted—let it go! Oh! I tread on air, and I must breathe air. I simply must go out!"

"It will take me an hour," said Margaret, "to write letters to accompany these checks. After that we can go anywhere. I leave the choice to you, girls."

She went out of the drawing-room, closing the door after her. Betty and Kitty began to put the rings back into the jewel case. Sibyl rushed to the piano, opened it, and

played with intense gayety and spirit two or three of the lightest airs then in vogue. She was a musical girl, but even the power of the music could not hold her just then. As she said, she wanted air. She must breathe it fully, or her wild happiness would half-kill her. She went to her favorite seat on the balcony, and, leaning over the railing, looked down into the square garden. There were gates to Rosemary Gardens, and from where Sibyl stood she had a good view of the gates. At this hour of the morning, carts, carriages, equipages, of all kinds were coming and going. The cries of the vegetable-mongers and the fruit-sellers in the street beyond were borne to the young girl's ears. The sun shone over everything; the day was cloudless, and the freshness of spring still lingered in the June air.

A young man walked rapidly through the gates, and came in the direction of No. 80. He was tall, with broad shoulders. He had a cane in his hand, and a rose in his button-hole. The moment she saw him Sibyl

sprang from her post of observation, and, sinking down on a low garden chair, pretended to turn the leaves of a book.

The young man had seen the flash of her white draperies, however. He hurried his footsteps, came under the balcony, and stood still.

Sibyl did not move, nor raise her eyes. She looked like a maiden spellbound by what she was reading, but she did not turn a page. The young man remained quite still, then he began, in a very low, sweet sort of way to whistle that most seductive of all airs, "Garry Owen."

He whistled right through the air once, and was beginning it a second time when bang went Sibyl's book on the floor, and her head popped over the balcony.

"I might have known that was you, Mark! What a hideously vulgar thing you are whistling! How do you do?"

"I do very well, thank you. Is it too early to pay a call at No. 80?"

"Yes, it would not be correct."

“There’s some nice shade in the Gardens now, and nobody there.”

“Go and take a stroll in the shade, and when you’re tired whistle ‘Garry Owen’ once again. Good-by.”

“But, Sibyl——”

“Yes; I really can’t shout to you any more from the balcony. These are not the days of——”

She was absolutely going to say *Romeo and Juliet*, but blushed a rosy red instead.

“These are not the days of Shakespeare,” responded the young man gravely, “so, as I really want to say something, had I not better come in?”

“How tiresome you are, Mark; and unreasonable, and provoking! Well, if you must come in, you must. I’ll run down and let you in myself.”

She rushed across the drawing-room, knocking down a small table in her flight.

“What *is* the matter?” exclaimed Kitty.
“Where are you going, Sib?”

“Oh, it’s only that stupid Mark Danby. He will bother me to speak to him.”

She slammed the door noisily after her.

“Stupid, indeed!” echoed Kitty, looking at Betty.

Betty rose, stretched herself slightly, and yawned.

“Never mind,” she said. “I am sure Mr. Danby knows his own affairs, and Sib won’t be guided by anyone.”

“I don’t want to interfere,” retorted Kitty. “Mark Danby is, without exception——”

Betty held up her finger.

“Hush!” she said, “they are coming——” and the next moment the pair entered the room, Sibyl talking high, with a pretty pretense of anger.

“Don’t you think Sibyl is very unkind to refuse me, Kitty?” said Danby. “She informs me you are all bound for Richmond, and declares I am on no account to accompany you. You’ll let me come, won’t you, Kitty?”

“You can come if you please,” answered Kitty. “That is, if Margaret says yes.”

“Where is Margaret?”

“In the library, writing letters.”

“I’ll find her and get permission at once.”

“No, don’t; she’s frightfully busy.”

“I’ll just get permission and come back again.”

He left the room without waiting for another word.

Sibyl buried her head in a great bunch of lilies of the valley, and laughed a low, silent laugh into their bells.

What a day it was! How different from yesterday, with its shadows and its distress! Yesterday Sibyl felt stern and virtuous; the path was of thorns, but she would tread on them, and not wince when they pierced her. To-day the path was of roses, and she felt that she was part of an idyl, and that Tennyson ought to write about her and Mark.

Margaret’s letters were written and posted, and soon after a merry party of five went down to Richmond. They had a boat and

went on the river, and afterward dined in a private room in the "Star and Garter." A feeling of rest was over all four girls. Disgrace had nearly touched them, but it had gone away again. Danby and Sibyl laughed and quizzed one another unmercifully. The other three made plans together. The old life was to be resumed, and now it was to be truly a perfect life, for no debts could be contracted.

Three of the girls talked of money, for the want of money had been their sore sorrow of yesterday. But Sibyl, who had perhaps, felt that sorrow the most keenly the day before, had soared high above the region of money now. She laughed, and jested, and avoided personal topics, but all the time her heart was singing the sweetest of all songs, and her eyes looked like dark violets.

The girls came home in the dusk of the evening, and Danby bade them good-by under the shade of the porch at No. 80.

"I'll see you to-morrow," he whispered to Sibyl.

She turned her head away. He took her silence for consent, and ran off happy.

The girls went into the house. A plain man, dressed very plainly, was standing in the hall.

“Can I speak to you in private, ma’am?”
he said to Margaret.

CHAPTER V.

"I WILL see you in here," said Margaret, in a cold voice.

She opened the door of a small room on the ground floor, which she used as a sort of private study. It was a dull little room, and was dark now, for the servants had not thought of lighting the gas.

"Had you not better go into father's study, Maggie?" exclaimed Sibyl. "This room is not lighted."

"No, I will come here," replied Margaret. "I can soon turn the gas on."

She found a wax taper, held it to one of the jets in the hall, and soon the little room was filled with an ugly, hot light.

Margaret called the plain man in, and the door was closed behind them. The three other girls went up to the drawing-room. Here it was deliciously fresh and cool, for

the windows were wide open, the gas burnt low, and the softened light from one or two shaded lamps gave a refined appearance. There were fresh flowers, too, in baskets and vases, and their perfume added to the pleasant, luxurious feeling of the drawing-room.

“How delicious this old room is!” said Betty. “I do think ours is the prettiest drawing-room in London. Isn’t the effect out of these windows quite country-like, the moon glinting through the trees in the Square garden, and that little rustle of the wind among the leaves !”

“I vote we have supper in the drawing-room,” said Kitty. “I’ll ring the bell, and ask Peters to bring up a tray with some fruit and milk.”

She did so ; the man appeared. She gave her order, and he closed the door respectfully behind him.

“How nice to feel that Peters has been paid all his wages in full,” said Betty. “I can order him about now : I couldn’t yesterday.”

Sibyl went out on the balcony. She wanted to look at the moon in the Square garden; she wanted to be alone. She felt quite sure that something very nice was going to happen—something that would change all the world for her, something that would take all the commonplace out of life, that would put the ideal in.

Sybil was delighted to feel that she was going henceforth to live the ideal life.

“What a change from yesterday!” she murmured; and half unconsciously, half out of sympathy with somebody, she whistled a bar of “Garry Owen.”

Just then the hall door was banged rather noisily, and the man in plain clothes walked down the steps, and up the road toward the gates of Rosemary Gardens.

“What an ugly man!” thought Sibyl. “What a detestable man! He makes me shiver. I do think the night has turned suddenly cold.”

She came in and began to close the windows.

"What *are* you doing?" exclaimed her sisters.

"It has turned cold," said Sibyl. "Don't you notice it?"

Kitty laughed.

"Cold! *you* must be cold, child!" she said. "The evening is grilling. Betty and I are simply melted. Ah! here comes supper and something to drink. That's good, and better still, here's Maggie. Maggie, what did that queer man want?"

"I'll tell you after supper," replied Margaret.

The servant, having placed the tray on a small table, withdrew, and Margaret began to help her sisters to plates of strawberries and cream. She was busy, moving deftly about, and her silence was unnoticed. She did not eat any fruit herself. This was also unnoticed, for happiness makes people queerly selfish now and then, and the other three felt intensely happy while they ate their frugal supper of fruit and milk.

When the meal was over Sibyl stood up,

stretched herself, yawned, and turned to the others.

“I’m sleepy,” she said. “I shall go to bed. Good-night, everybody.”

“Come here first, Sib,” said Margaret.

There was something a little strained in Margaret’s tone, but still none of the others noticed it. Sibyl went lightly up to her.

“Did I hear you say, Sibyl, that Mark might call here to-morrow?”

Sibyl blushed all over her face.

“He said he would come,” she answered. Then she added, half pettishly—for she did not half like the consciousness that three pairs of eyes were fixed on her—“Not that I gave him leave—he does it on his own responsibility.”

“But you don’t forbid him to come?”

“Maggie, of course not.”

“You know what he is coming for?”

“How can I possibly tell? I’m dreadfully sleepy; do let me go to bed.”

Margaret put her arm round her slim young sister’s waist. It seemed to Sibyl—

but this may have been fancy—that she leant against her as if she suddenly needed support. Her voice, however, had not a trace of apparent emotion in it.

“Don’t go to bed yet, dear,” she said; “I have something to say.”

Sibyl dropped into a low chair, crossed her hands on her lap, and glanced with the dawning of fright in her eyes at Kitty and Betty. They were also sitting, but Margaret stood.

“I have something to say,” she began. She seemed to find the next words difficult. Her lips were dry; it was a distinct effort to get out any further speech.

“I thought I ought to say it before we went to bed,” she began again. “We have had a happy day—it is over, we shan’t have any more.”

“Margaret!” Three voices uttered the name in different accents of distress.

“We are dishonored,” said Margaret. Then she looked out of the window. Her lips were trembling, her brows slightly knit. She was on the verge of breaking down.

She did not. In half a moment she recovered herself.

“Girls,” she said suddenly, “I won’t keep the truth from you any longer. I cannot, I dare not. Once I thought I’d let you all have happy dreams to-night, but delay would only be cruel. Oh! my darlings, how can I take the brightness from you? O Sib, my dear, my sweet, how can I take the joy from your life? And yet you ought to know the truth.”

Sibyl sat in a speechless maze, but Kitty came up to Margaret and took her hands.

“Of course, we ought to know the truth, dear,” she said. “Don’t tremble, Maggie; whatever is wrong, it is not your fault, and it is far better to know the truth at once.”

“The truth is this,” said Margaret. “Our father has—has—disgraced us and himself.”

Sibyl sprang to her feet. Her face turned crimson, words rose to her lips. She came close to Margaret, and was beginning to pour out a torrent of indignant questions when Kitty interrupted her.

"Don't," she said. "You see Maggie has only begun to speak; let her go on. Don't interrupt. Who cares what *you* think at this moment! Now then, Maggie, dear, you'll be better after you have told us everything."

"I'll never be better," answered Margaret. "I never can be better nor well again. This is the truth, girls. Our father has absconded. He has taken money, and he has disappeared. That man in plain clothes is a detective. He has asked me questions—many questions. He says he will find our father, and if he finds him he will be——"

"Don't," said Sibyl. "Don't say it. I know what you mean, only don't say it."

"I don't want to," said Margaret in a dreary voice. "Perhaps our father will not be found. That is the best thing we can hope for; he is clever, and it is possible he has got away safely."

"I don't understand," said Betty. "It is something very awful, but I don't take it in. What money could father take? I thought the business was his own."

"Yes," replied Margaret, "but there were partners—and—and other people's money was involved. Anyhow he has gone, and taken a large sum with him."

"Maggie!" suddenly exclaimed Sibyl, her voice rising to a piercing cry, "what about the checks that were sent out this morning? Was he paying all those awful debts with the money he had stolen?"

"I don't know," replied Margaret.

"Are those ten £10 notes stolen money?"

"I don't know," responded Margaret again.

"Maggie, have you nothing to say?"

"What can I have to say? What can anyone have to say who has just been stunned? I am stunned, and I have nothing to say."

Margaret had stood all the time she was speaking. Now she turned suddenly and walked out of the room. The other girls did not attempt to detain her; indeed, her absence gave them a certain sense of relief. They could at least huddle together, and discuss the catastrophe which was crushing

them. They knew that it affected Margaret more painfully than anyone else, but all their hopes were equally shattered; they looked at one another in affright.

“To have had a long, lingering sense of depression,” said Betty at last, “and then to have had it lifted for twelve short, beautiful hours, and now this crushing blow! Well, I must confess that I cannot comprehend it.”

It was midnight when the girls went to bed. They crept upstairs softly, for they did not want the servants to hear them. As they passed Margaret’s door, they saw a light streaming out.

“Poor Maggie!” they said one to the other. But they were all too unhappy about themselves just then to volunteer to go in and comfort her.

CHAPTER VI.

THE story of a ruined house and home is generally a nine days' wonder. If the catastrophe is anything on a large scale, the papers take it up, and the world speaks, and wags its censorious old head. There is gossip and talk, commiseration, contempt, scorn, and, in the end, forgetfulness. The world rushes away to revel in a greater scandal; friends return to their own interests; the thing that seemed so mighty to the victims ceases to excite comment. Its brief day is over; it sinks into oblivion.

This was the case with that disgraceful crash which brought to the ground an old and much-respected firm, which ruined some small tradespeople, and some widows, and simple country folk, and which absolutely destroyed the happy home in Rosemary Gardens.

This story is not about the crash, nor its victims, but about four girls who, in consequence of it, had to turn round and face the world, and prove the metal they were made of.

That happy June day at Richmond was followed by an awful fortnight of suspense. Mr. Ross was not the only partner who had vanished, to all appearance, from the face of the earth. Three men had fled, taking money with them. If they were captured the excitement and disgrace and exposure would be all the greater.

They were not captured. Strange as it may seem in these days of detectives and telegrams and civilized *espionage*, they managed to escape, and at the end of a fortnight the unhappy girls began to entertain a scanty hope that their father might never be found. It was poor consolation at the best, but things were so low with them just then that they clung even to the uttermost shreds of hope.

One day the post brought a letter for Mar-

garet. She opened it, read its contents, and handed it to her sisters.

“It is from Uncle David,” she said. “He writes that he will call here to-day at twelve o’clock. He wishes to see us all together. You had better not go out, Sibyl.”

“As if I wanted to!” said Sibyl.

She spoke in a pettish tone, and would not raise her eyes to meet her sister’s.

“Poor child?” thought Margaret. “It falls more heavily on her than on any of us—that is, in some ways, I mean. Why has Mark not been near the house for the last fortnight?”

Punctually at twelve o’clock Mr. David Ross arrived. He was not a London man; he had come from Yorkshire for the express purpose of seeing his nieces. He had neither part nor lot in his brother’s affair, and was himself stern and honorable, rather close as concerns money, and rather chary with regard to kind words. He had kept aloof from the girls for a fortnight, but now he thought it well to pay the poor, unhappy girls a visit.

They none of them wanted him nor cared for him, but that did not at all matter to David Ross.

“ Well, my dears,” he said, when he entered the drawing-room, “ this is very sad, very terrible, and it cannot be regarded as a divine dispensation, for it is the result of dishonest wickedness. How are you, Margaret ? You look pale ! ”

“ I am quite well, thank you, Uncle David.”

Mr. Ross touched his niece's forehead with his lips. The three other girls came up to him, and he performed the same ceremony on the brow of each. Then he sat down in a deep easy-chair, and stared all round the room.

“ This is a handsome apartment,” he said.

The girls did not feel it necessary to make any response to their uncle's remark.

“ A very handsome room ! ” he repeated. “ Showily and extravagantly furnished, with a vast lot of unnecessary sunshine. And absolutely flowers, fresh-cut flowers, in the vases ! ”

“ Poor Mrs. Moore brought them yesterday,”

interrupted Betty. "She was in the country, and she brought a basket back with her. We did *not* buy them. Don't think so."

Sibyl kicked out her foot impatiently. Mr. Ross had prominent, light gray eyes—they were cold in expression, and could look almost lusterless when he chose. These lusterless eyes now gazed full at Betty, and then dropped to the level of poor Sibyl's little pointed shoe.

"You have grown a good deal, my dear," he said, addressing his youngest niece. "You are quite a big girl for your age. And, by the way, how old are you?"

"I am nineteen," said Sibyl, "I have been grown-up for two years or more."

"H'm—ha! That's as other people think. Muriel is seventeen, and *she* calls herself grown-up. Little chit! I consider her an infant."

The fishy eyes grew softer as Muriel's name was mentioned, and Margaret hastened to ask a question or two about her cousin.

"We will speak of Muriel presently, my

dears. I will now come briefly to the subject which has brought me to town. Plain and ugly truths must be put in a plain and uncompromising fashion; and, without wishing unnecessarily to hurt your feelings, I must acquaint you with the fact that you are penniless and disgraced young women."

"No, Uncle, that is not at all the case," suddenly retorted Sibyl.

"What do you mean, miss?"

"We are without money, but we are not disgraced."

"How do you put that, my dear niece?"

Sibyl sprang to her feet; her great beautiful eyes flashed sudden sparks of fire.

"Because no one life can disgrace another," she said; "because God has given each of us our own lives. He has given me my life, and Maggie, and Kitty, and Betty theirs; and whatever our father has done, we are honorable girls, and we mean to go on being honorable girls. We are poor, but we are not disgraced. I deny it for myself, and for Maggie, and Kitty, and Betty. When I do

a mean, dirty, shabby thing, my very own self, then shall I be disgraced—not before!”

Sibyl rushed to Margaret's side, put her arms round her neck, laid her head on her shoulder, and cried quietly.

“Heroics!” muttered Uncle David—“very young heroics!” Aloud, he said: “My dears, we must to business. I have come up to town at the express request of your Aunt Matilda to see if there is any way in which we can help you.”

“Oh, no, thank you, Uncle,” said Kitty.

“Why do you say ‘No, thank you,’ miss? Have you already taken steps to earn your own living? If so, I am pleased to hear it.”

“It has been too soon to take decided steps,” responded Betty, “but Kitty is right; we wish to be independent.”

“Oh, pooh! independent—with nothing a year! Now, my dears, listen to me. This house and furniture will be sold by the creditors. Then you will be homeless, as well as penniless. Margaret, who is a well-educated girl, can earn a good income as a governess.

You two middle ones, Kitty and Betty I believe you are called, must get situations somehow and somewhere. I will see to that; I have a good deal of influence, and I know a home for ladies where you will be received until such situations are forthcoming. Sibyl shall come home with me. Muriel wants a companion, and Sibyl shall have the run of the house."

Having delivered himself of this oration in a monotonous tone of voice, Mr. Ross suddenly stopped speaking. He looked round at his four nieces, and after the pause of a full minute said abruptly to Margaret:

"I wish to catch the three o'clock train to the north, and should be much obliged if you would get me a cup of coffee before I start."

"But, uncle——" began Betty.

"Not a word, my dears—not another word. Matters are now satisfactorily arranged—much better and quicker than writing. Margaret, kindly order your servant to bring me some coffee."

Margaret left the room. She was some lit-

tle time away, and during her absence Mr. Ross pottered about, poking his nose into every corner, and indulging in disparaging remarks generally.

“A most expensive room!” he said: “ridiculous fallals lying about everywhere. No wonder my poor, miserable brother disgraced his family! Now look here, Sibyl, when you come to Shortlands, you’ll have to do with plain furniture—plain dress, plain living, plain food. But mind you, no debts, no shiftless, beggarly ways—all straight as a die, and above board and honorable. Those are the ways at Shortlands, and you had better be prepared for them when you come.”

“But I’m not coming, Uncle David.”

“Pooh, my dear! I’ll send you the price of a second-class ticket, and expect you to arrive this day fortnight. You can’t starve in London, child, and as you happen to be blessed or cursed, I don’t know which—probably the latter, with good looks, the sooner you become the inmate of a plain

Christian home the better. There, my dear, you leave your nonsense and your airs behind you in London, and if you do there is nothing to prevent your having a happy time with my little girl Muriel."

Again at the mention of Muriel's name a softened expression passed over Mr. Ross's face. Margaret returned to the room, and a servant shortly appeared with a tray, which contained coffee and cakes. Mr. Ross drank his coffee with relish, ate some cake sparingly, once again kissed his nieces on their foreheads, told Sibyl he would send her a postal order for her fare, and expect her to arrive at Shortlands that day fortnight, and finally left Rosemary Gardens, in ample time to catch his return train to the north.

The moment he was gone Sibyl rushed out of the room, dashed up to the top of the house, where her own little bedroom was, put on her hat, twisted a black lace scarf round her neck, and, seizing her parasol and gloves, ran downstairs again and out of the house. It was a fortnight to-day since an

arrow had been planted in the poor little girl's heart, and she was not at all accustomed to its presence there, nor did she feel in the least inclined to endure its aching wound.

She left the house now because it seemed too small to hold her and her tortured feelings.

"I suppose it's because I'm younger than the others that I feel almost mad with grief," she said to herself. "But then Maggie and Betty and Kitty have not got Mark. O Mark! what *has* become of you? Has the ground opened and swallowed you up? Why have you not come near me, nor written, nor given me the smallest token of your presence since that awful night a fortnight ago?"

Sibyl quickly left Rosemary Gardens. The day was an intensely hot one in July, but the whirl of thoughts in her soul made her indifferent to the fierce heat of the sun. She hurried along the High Street, soon reached Kensington Gardens, and sat down under the

shade of a widespreading elm-tree. Some children were playing in the distance; some nurses were gossiping together; a little gentle breeze came up at intervals, and touched Sibyl's hot cheeks.

She sat and looked straight before her and wondered if she were going through a nightmare, and if presently she would awake with a start, and find that all her tortures were only the result of a bad dream.

She shook herself impatiently once or twice, and, by dint of exercising a tremendous amount of imagination, almost brought herself to believe that she was going back presently to the old bright home in Rosemary Gardens; that, when she felt tired of sitting here, she might cross the High Street, and pass through the sheltering gates, and go up into the pretty drawing-room; that Peters would bring in the tea-equipage, and Margaret would preside, and friends would drop in and chat.

One friend would come among the others—a certain young man, who had a pleasant way; who had a gay voice for talking, whist-

ling, and singing ; who could rattle off an air on the piano, and give utterance to a trivial nothing, which yet, because of the intonation and because of the accompanying glance, meant—oh, pshaw ! Sibyl sprang to her feet, and shook herself impatiently.

“I won’t think in that style any longer,” she said half aloud. “The old life is dead. It has been put into a coffin, and buried twenty feet deep under the ground. The Mark I used to know is buried with the life. What *is* the use of thinking about what’s gone ? I’ll go home and talk to Kitty about Shortlands. Hateful Shortlands ! I’m not going to live there. Hateful Muriel, with her plain dress and plain ways—*most* hateful Uncle David, but I’m not going to you, and your honest Shortlands ! No, I’d rather beg first.”

“My dear, how fearfully hot you will make yourself if you pace up and down so fast on this broiling day,” suddenly remarked an old lady, who was sitting near. Sibyl stopped, looked at her, half laughed, uttered an almost unintelligible apology and hurried home.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE were two ways of reaching No. 80 Rosemary Gardens : one was the direct path which led straight from the gates to the house. Up this path Mark Danby had come on the morning that Sibyl had sat in the balcony and watched him.

Perhaps for this reason she avoided the direct path now, and took the longer way round in preference. By this road she lost sight of No. 80, and had to traverse two sides of the Square before she found it again.

Certainly Rosemary Gardens was a dismal place. Most of the houses were stuccoed, and the stucco had fallen off in large quantities, leaving the most dreary of all forms of house ugliness behind. Fresh paint was almost unknown in the Gardens ; tidiness and neatness seemed to have neither part nor

lot in these dreary old mansions ; nearly half of them were empty, with shutters against the windows, and dismal black boards, signifying that the mansions were at the disposal of the public, leant forlornly against the respective railings.

Sibyl walked hurriedly past these empty houses. She had seen them many times before, and did not notice them in the least now. She was hurrying home, although she did not see the least manner of use in hastening her steps.

To get to No. 80 she had to pass a large corner house, which, unlike its neighbors, showed some tokens of neatness and care. It was not a gay house, like No. 80 ; it was stuccoed in drab, like its neighbors to the right and left, but the stucco was unbroken anywhere ; the railings were whole, the windows clean. A wide balcony extended beyond the drawing-rooms at this house. It was a larger balcony than that which had been made so picturesque at No. 80. But it contained no striped awning, no flowers, no

graceful bamboo chairs and lounges. There was a chair in it, however, an old-fashioned mahogany chair, with arms, and in the chair now sat an old lady.

Her name was Jessica Power. She was unmarried, and, for some reason known only to herself, she liked all her friends to call her Jessica. Even young men, who did not know her particularly well, addressed Miss Power as "Jessica." They did so by her express invitation, accepting the fact that she was a little odd, but liking her none the worse for that.

As Sibyl now passed under the balcony of the corner house, Miss Power popped her head over the railing and spoke to her.

"Is that you, Sibyl Ross? Come up: I want to speak to you."

"Very well, Jessica," replied Sibyl.

She ran up the steps and rang the bell. In a moment or two a very old servant answered her summons. She wore on her head a high mob cap, with a broad band of black ribbon tied comfortably round the cap



"THE OLD BODY DROPPED A RESPECTFUL COURTESY."

and under her chin. She had a dress made of a gayly flowered old-fashioned chintz, with sleeves which used to be called "leg-of-mutton," and a black apron of alpaca, with deep pockets.

"Your mistress has asked me to run up to the drawing-room to speak to her, Susannah," announced Sibyl, when the servant opened the door.

The old body dropped a respectful courtesy, pointed to the staircase, mumbled something about bringing up tea in a few minutes, and disappeared.

Sibyl ran upstairs and entered the drawing-room. Miss Power came forward to meet her. She was dressed in a very rich black silk, with a cap of choice lace on her head. Her hair was gray, her eyes dark, her smile pleasant.

"You have not been near me for a fortnight, Sibyl!" she said.

"Oh, Jessica! you know why I have not come to see you," replied Sibyl, her lips beginning to tremble.

Miss Power took one of Sibyl's hands in her own.

"Come and sit by me in the balcony, my love," she said. "Here, this is your favorite little chair. Now, Sibyl, I saw you passing, and an impulse made me call out to you. I know *everything*: there has not been one scrap of the gossip which has not reached me; Susannah took care of that. Susannah doesn't talk much, but she goes out in the evening, and she listens to the gossip of the neighbors, and what she hears she gathers up. Susannah poured her gatherings into my ears for the last fortnight, Sibyl."

"Yes, Jessica."

"So, my love, I know all about everything—I probably know three times or four times as much as really happened. But I like to assure you on this point, so that you need not have to tell me the tale over again. Now I asked you to come up to put a plump question to you."

"Very well, Jessica."

"What a dead-and-alive 'very well'!

Why, a fortnight ago, the child could scarcely contain her own high spirits, and now—I don't believe Susannah has exaggerated her report so much."

"She could not have exaggerated," said Sibyl, in a low voice. "Nothing, nothing, could be worse than what has happened."

"Well, my love, well—we won't go into that now. Here's my plain question, Sibyl: Do you and your sisters mean to take a good, hard grip of the situation, or will you let matters slide?"

Sibyl opened her eyes very wide. For a moment a look of resolution and courage filled them; then they drooped, tears gathered under the full lids, and a broken, crushed kind of voice issued from the soft, rosy lips.

"I feel just now," said Sibyl, "that I must let matters slide. There is no grip in me anywhere."

"That is bad, my love, and there must be a reason for it, over and above the mere fact of your money being gone. The loss of

money never crushed Nineteen yet, never—impossible. Nineteen laughs at money, and doesn't believe in it. Oh, my dear child, the charm and the power and the greatness of Nineteen are more than a match for all the money in the world. You must have another trouble, Sibyl."

"Don't question me, Jessica!"

"But I must. It is absolutely necessary that I should get to the bottom of everything."

"Oh! I can't be probed. Do turn your eyes away. I really cannot bear to be cross-examined just now."

"Well, well, poor little girl, I would not be unkind for the world. Here comes Susannah with the tea. You shall pour me out a cup of tea, Sibyl. Susannah, we'll have the little table out here on the balcony. Thank you—I see you have remembered all my wants. These strawberries look tempting, the cream is fresh, and here are Miss Sibyl's own favorite tea-cakes! Now, Sibyl, help me first, and then yourself. That will

do, Susannah, you can leave us now, and be sure you shut the door after you."

Susannah dropped another of her old-world courtesies, looked at her mistress, then rolled her eyes with an interrogative glance at Sibyl, made no comment with her lips, but said unutterable things by means of her expressive face, and tripping neatly out of the balcony, went across the drawing-room and disappeared.

"Susannah is a dear old soul!" remarked Miss Power.

"I suppose she is," answered Sibyl, "but isn't she a remarkably silent old soul as well? I have hardly ever heard her speak."

"My love, she never does, except rather late in the evening. Then, as a rule, she unburdens herself to me. Her words come with a rush, and I expect the effort exhausts her, for I can scarcely get her to articulate until the same hour arrives the following night. But now to return to you and your sisters. How are the other three girls, by the way?"

"I suppose they are quite well."

"Is Margaret quite well? If there is one of you about whom I have felt a degree of anxiety, that one is Margaret."

"Thank you, Jessica. Margaret is not ill."

"Well, that is good news. I knew she was a brave girl. In fact, you all are. You'll all take a firm grip presently, even you, my poor little nineteen-year-old."

"Jessica," said Sibyl, suddenly, "do you know that Uncle David Ross came to see us to-day? He has offered me a home at Shortlands."

"Well, my love?"

"I am to go and live there, Jessica, to be a companion to Muriel Ross. I am to help to amuse her, and for that purpose he says I shall have the run of the house."

"Yes, dear."

"You wouldn't say 'Yes, dear,' in that calm voice, Jessica, if you had listened to Uncle David this morning. He says the house is a plain house, the people plain, the

ways plain. By 'plain' read 'ugly,'—the people are ugly, and their ways are mean."

"Oh, tut, child! you have no right to speak in that fashion."

Miss Power got up, shook some crumbs out of her black silk dress, and, leaning over the balcony, looked down the gardens as far as she could see.

"There is nobody coming," she said, after a pause.

"No," returned Sibyl, with a sigh. "Nobody ever does come, just now."

Miss Power gave the girl a quick look.

"Go home, my love," she said, after a pause. "Come back to see me to-night, or to-morrow, or any time when you feel stronger, and in the meantime take a message from me to the sister who has the greatest taste for housekeeping, who has the largest supply of spirit to carry her through this adversity, and who, in short, is most likely to take a grip of the situation. Which of your sisters will you send to see me, Sibyl?"

Sibyl absolutely laughed, and the dawning of interest began to appear in her eyes.

“Jessica,” she said, “you are like no one else. You never do things without meaning. What can be your meaning now?”

“You’ll know fast enough, child, if I can see sufficient grip in any of the family. It all depends on that. Now, who will you send?”

“Margaret always used to be our housekeeper, and she is brave—oh, very brave. But I think, Jessica, I do think somewhere below the surface Maggie carries about with her a broken heart. You know what she thought of our—our father.”

“I know, child. I know perfectly. Poor Maggie! I always knew it would come hardest on her.”

“But she is a very good housekeeper, Jessica. Shall I send her to you?”

“Perhaps not, my dear. She will find her niche, no doubt, but I must have spirit as well as talent—I must have cheerfulness, dash, daring.”

“Good gracious, Jessica! what can you mean?”

“I thought I’d excite your curiosity, Sibyl. I see, my love, that you’ll recover by and by. You feel low enough to-day, but in the end you won’t let matters slide. Please now tell me about your middle sisters. What about Kitty and Betty? Describe their characters. Speak of them as if you were writing a description to go into a novel.”

Sibyl laughed again.

“Kitty is very fearless,” she began.

“Fearless—that is good. What else is Kitty?”

“She has such high spirits that even during the last fortnight she has been heard to laugh; she is awfully clever, and she can say sharp, witty things; she is quick, too, and practical.”

“Capital girl Kitty must be,” rejoined Jessica. “Now about Betty?”

“Betty is nearly as good a housekeeper as Maggie. She is a better cook than Kitty, and she is clever with her needle. In other

ways she is Kitty's shadow; they are scarcely ever apart, and I am almost sure they think the same thoughts."

"Excellent—most excellent. Send them both to see me to-morrow morning. I breakfast at eight. Let them be here sharp at nine. Now, one question more. Who are your solicitors?"

"Our what?"

"My dear, there must be some business people acting for you, or if not for you, at any rate for your father's creditors. If you do not know the name, find it out, and send me word at once."

"I think I do know, for Margaret has mentioned them several times. Messrs. Rogers & Turner, of Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"Thank you, my dear child. Now you can run home. Be sure you give my message to Kitty and Betty."

CHAPTER VIII.

SIBYL ran downstairs, and, without waiting for Susannah's aid, let herself out into the street. There was animation once more in her face and bearing. She looked younger than when she had entered the house. She did not know why she felt hopeful, but hope unquestionably once more shone in her eyes. She was conscious of a distinct sense of curiosity, and prepared to rush eagerly home, and give an animated account of her interview with Jessica Power.

She raced down the massive flight of stone steps which led from the deep portico to the street. Then she stood still. The color rushed like a flood all over her face. The next moment it receded, leaving it stricken, and pale, and wretched. Mark Danby was walking fast to meet her; he came up, and, before she could prevent him, took one of her hands in both of his.

"I have been at No. 80," he said; "you were not there. Kitty was in, and she gave me some tea. I thought, perhaps, you were with Jessica; I meant to call on the chance."

Mark spoke in a hurry. All the time he was speaking his eyes were fixed on Sibyl's face. They were dark eyes, bold and eager in expression. Sibyl would have given worlds to turn from their gaze at that instant. The sudden meeting agitated her. She was dreadfully afraid of tears coming. She knew she ought to be cold, and proud, and distant. She hated the flutter of joy which filled her heart; and she was painfully conscious that her face was a transparent one, and that Mark was looking through it into her soul.

"Haven't you a word to say to me, Sibyl?"

"Oh! of course, Mark, how do you do? Please let go my hand."

Danby unclasped his own strong hands slowly.

"You don't look well," he said, in a grave voice. "You look much worse than Kitty."

“ Oh, please don’t talk about my looks.”

“ Well, I have a good many other things to talk about. Where can we go to have a quiet time ? ”

“ Nowhere.”

“ Sibyl, you don’t mean that ? ”

Danby turned round and looked once more at the young girl. She tried to avoid returning his glance. Then her shy eyes were raised to his. He smiled at her ; and, in spite of herself, Sibyl returned the smile.

“ My little darling,” he said, in a fervent, passionate voice.

He drew Sibyl’s hand through his arm. Nobody saw them in the old, deserted gardens.

“ Let us come into the Square garden ; it will be absolutely empty,” said Danby.

They went there without another word. The Square garden had one or two broken-down rural seats. It was a place not kept in any kind of order, and, but for its tennis-court, would have been a howling wilderness long ago. When Danby and Sibyl entered

the garden the tennis-court was empty. They found a rustic seat which was sufficiently whole to bear their weight, and sat down side by side. Danby sat close to Sibyl. She did not move away; she remained absolutely motionless, her hands crossed idly on her light summer dress, her eyes gazing straight before her. Once again her eyes had grown dark and deep, and looked like spring violets in the midst of her fair face.

Mark Danby had almost killed her with his neglect, but this was absolutely forgotten now; he had come back again—he would give a good reason for the absence which had almost broken her heart.

“Sibyl, you know what I was coming for that day?” he began, suddenly. “Speak to me, look at me, say you know.”

“But—but you didn’t come, Mark.”

“I will explain that later. Answer my question now. Say you know what I was coming about.”

“I—I—am not quite sure.”

“Sibyl, are you speaking the truth? Look



“THEY FOUND A RUSTIC SEAT.”

at me, look me full in the face, and say those words again. Say again that you are not quite sure."

Sibyl would have given the world to make a saucy rejoinder. She could not; she felt exactly as if she were under a spell; her lips quivered; she turned her head, and looked at Mark.

"I did know," she said, almost in a whisper.

"Ah, my little darling! I won't torture you any longer. I was coming to ask you to be my wife: I ask you now. Come into my arms, and say 'Yes' there."

Danby came closer, folded his arms round the girl, who half shrunk from, half leant against him, and printed a kiss on her lips.

"You will be my wife?" said he.

"Oh, Mark, I love you!" said Sibyl.

And now all the tears of a fortnight past appeared to have broken their barriers. She struggled in vain to restrain them; they would have their way, and came, accompanied by a few deep-drawn, painful sobs.

Mark Danby was like many other men ; he hated to see a woman cry. He was fond of Sibyl, but he wished she would not weep so violently while she leant against him.

“ You have not answered my question,” he said, presently. “ I have asked you to be my wife. I want to hear ‘ Yes ’ from those lips, and, Sibyl, I want those pretty eyes of yours to look at me through smiles, not tears.”

Sibyl made a tremendous effort. Her choking, painful sobs grew less ; they ceased. She even gave Mark the smile he wished for.

“ You will be my wife, darling ? ” said the young man, stooping and kissing her once again. At the second kiss she started back, and almost pushed him from her.

“ You mustn’t kiss me any more,” she said. “ I am not yours.”

“ Not mine ! I like that, and just after telling me that you loved me—and, Sibyl, you look as if you loved me.”

“ Yes, Mark, I do love you.”

“ Then why do you say you are not mine ? ” Danby suddenly pulled out his

watch. "I say ! I had no idea it was so late. I have to be at Waterloo to catch a train for the country before seven o'clock. Now, Sibyl, you know you love me, and of course you'll be my wife. We must be married soon—very soon—almost at once. I'll come to see you again early next week, only let me hear 'Yes' from the lips I love best before I go."

"Dear, dear Mark, I long to say 'Yes,' but I dare not, I must not. My people are disgraced, and I won't bring disgrace upon you. I said to Uncle David Ross to-day that my father's dishonor could not spoil my life, but, oh, it does—it does—cruelly !"

"Sib, you are a perfect little goose. What *do* I care about your father, or any nonsense of that sort ? We'll be married, my dear, and live happy ever after. To hear you talk, anyone would suppose you had been having a conversation with my worldly old mother."

"Ah," said Sibyl, with a start, "I knew Lady Jane Danby would not approve of me."

“Let her not approve! *I* do, and I suppose I am the person to be principally considered. Now, Sibyl, I really must fly; give me another kiss, and say ‘Yes.’”

Sibyl struggled against the kiss, not outwardly, but in that mental part of her being which told her to be stiff and cold and to flee from temptation. But her struggle was feeble and ineffectual. The kiss was given and returned, and something was murmured into Mark's ears which appeared to satisfy him. He crushed the girl's hands between his own so frantically that she almost cried with pain, and, promising to write and to return without fail the following week, he left her.

Sibyl came out of the Square garden presently, with a confused, delirious sense of bliss in her heart, and an intangible, and yet very real pricking of her conscience.

She was engaged to Mark Danby; her wish was granted; her crowning desire given to her. She loved him with the fervor of a very passionate, willful nineteen-year-old girl.

He was full of faults, and she thought him a god.

Poor conscience ! It had not much chance of being heard just then. The more Sibyl thought of what had happened the greater rose her ecstasy. When she entered No. 80, it seemed once more to herself that she was treading on air.

Since the crash of a fortnight ago the girls had given up late dinner ; Peters, with several other servants, had disappeared from the establishment. The cooking at No. 80 was scanty just now, and the attendance of the most meager. Except five o'clock tea, a meal which no woman under any circumstances will do without, the Rosses took food anyhow, anywhere, and anywhen. They were now in the drawing-room, and might, or might not, take supper before they retired for the night.

Sibyl was rushing past the closed doors of the drawing-room to seek the shelter of her own bedroom, when suddenly a pair of hands were placed before her eyes from behind, and

Kitty's high, cheerful, but somewhat teasing, voice was heard :

“Not a bit of it, Sib! You are not going to banish yourself in this style. Come right into the drawing-room, and tell us what you have been doing all these long hours when you have so mysteriously absented yourself. If you are a good girl, and give a fair, unvarnished account of your doings, I'll tell you who I had the pleasure of entertaining in your absence.”

“Kitty, do let me go upstairs, I'm so tired,” pleaded Sibyl.

“Tired? I never saw you look better in my life.”

“But I am tired, really. I look well because my cheeks are flushed.”

“Well, I suppose if you must banish yourself, you must. Poor little Sib! Margaret is in the drawing-room, and so is Betty, and we were having a rather interesting discussion with regard to ways and means.”

“Oh, I don't want to hear it—I *can't* listen.”

"As you please, my love. It concerns you as well as the rest of us. We were on the subject of summer dress, when I heard your fairy footfall, and rushed out to way-lay you."

"You will excuse my coming in, Kitty, and oh! I had a message for you. You and Betty are to go and see Jessica in the morning."

"Jessica? I don't know that we'll have time."

"You *must* go; she has sent a most particular message. You have to be there at nine o'clock. I really do think it's something important."

"Well, I'll tell Betty. Why doesn't Jessica send for Margaret if she has important things to talk over? Sibyl, you have not guessed whom I entertained this afternoon."

"I know," answered Sibyl. "You gave Mark Danby his tea."

"Then you met him?"

"Yes."

“Look at me, Sibyl. Hold up your head. Look me full in the face.”

“Yes, Kitty.”

“Sibyl!”

“Yes, Kitty; I’m not ashamed—I am engaged to Mark. I am going to marry him.”

CHAPTER IX.

MISS POWER was old and rich, and had apparently nothing whatever to do. Nevertheless she kept early hours, and never wasted a moment of her time. Punctually as the clock struck eight she sat down at the head of her modest breakfast-table, and drank the coffee, and helped herself to the nice fried bacon which Susannah invariably prepared for her.

Susannah, in her queer, old-fashioned dress, stood behind Miss Power's chair while she ate. Susannah looked intensely grim and respectful in this attitude, never indulging in speech, but showing by the queer contortions and varying expressions of her features that her thoughts were very busy.

Miss Power read the *Times* as she sipped her coffee, and when the meal was over the old servant brought the big family Bible, and Jane, the kitchen-maid, was summoned

up, and Miss Power read a few verses aloud. She never prayed, she only read the verses, and when she had finished she invariably went up to her drawing room, where she busied herself for an hour or two, getting it into the prim state of neatness which she loved best.

On this particular morning Susannah followed her mistress upstairs. She entered the drawing-room without knocking, and stood silent and respectful just within the door. Miss Power was maturing a stand of beautiful ferns; she turned round and said abruptly :

“I am coming to the kitchen by and by, Susannah; if you have any complaint to make of Jane you can make it then.”

“Eh, ma’am, not I,” answered Susannah. She closed her lips with a snap, as if she were locking them, but still she lingered in the room.

Miss Power stood still for a moment; a slight passing expression of annoyance swept over her fine face. It did not linger there;

she went up to the old servant, and spoke quietly :

“You have something on your mind, Susannah. Say it in as few words as possible, for I am expecting friends to call this morning, and am consequently very busy.”

“*I* know,” retorted Susannah, “*I* know who are coming.”

“Very well ; if you have anything to say about my visitors, say it and then go.”

“Eh, ma’am, it’s only this,” said Susannah ; she raised her sunken eyes, which were suddenly lighted with an inward fire. “It’s only a word, ma’am, and it won’t be hearkened to. Still, I must say it. Money’s hard to win, and easy to lose, and sore to do without, and who *are* those Rosses, I want to know. That’s what I say to myself. Who, and what are those Rosses ?”

“You can go downstairs now, Susannah,” replied Miss Power.

The old servant turned and left the room without another word.

"Susannah does not approve," murmured Miss Power to herself.

She did not say anything more, but, opening the windows which led into the balcony, stepped out, and looked up the Gardens in the direction of the Rosses' house. She saw no sign of Betty and Kitty approaching, but a postman just then ran up the high steps of her house, and deposited a letter in the box. A moment later Susannah brought it in, and presented it to her mistress on a silver salver.

Miss Power read the contents of her letter slowly, and with interest. Three sides of a sheet were closely written, and these were the contents :

ASHTON MANOR, July 11.

MY DEAR JESSICA :

There is not the least doubt that my foolish son Mark has gone absolutely to the length of *flirting* with a girl who lives somewhere in your Gardens. You know my views for Mark, and how much turns on them. Of course, under these circumstances, any wife of his own choosing would be unacceptable to me, but when, in addition, I discover that the object of his preference is one of the daughters of that dreadful man whose name has so lately figured in the newspapers—I allude to the Ross and Banbury business—you may guess what my feelings must be.

It is impossible for a mother to control the doings of a son who is not only grown up but a good deal over age. But tact, my dear Jessica, tact can do wonders in these delicate cases, and I am sure if it is in your power you will help me in this matter. Whatever happens, Mark must marry into a good family, and his wife must have money. You know how insecure my present position is, and will fully sympathize with me.

Yours affectionately,

JANE DANBY.

P. S.—I should be very glad to see you at Ashton Manor on Saturday, 25th, until Monday, 27th, if you can tear yourself away from your queer, delightful, funny old house, and queerer, and more delightful hand-maiden Susannah.

“But *I* cannot tear myself away from them,” murmured Miss Power. “This letter from beginning to end is balderdash. I never did care for you, Jane Danby, and I certainly do *not* feel inclined to begin to do so after reading a letter like this.”

Miss Power slipped it into her pocket as she spoke, for at this moment the drawing-room door was opened and Kitty and Betty, looking sweet and radiant in fresh cambric dresses, rushed in.

"Dear Jessica," they both exclaimed. They ran up to the old lady, and kissed her affectionately.

"Sibyl said you wanted to see us," remarked Kitty. "We are awfully busy, for the house and furniture are to be sold next week. And we want to take lodgings at once, and not to go to that dreadful home for women."

"No, we'd certainly die there," interposed Betty. "In homes of that sort nobody laughs, and nobody plays, and Kitty and I couldn't stand it—could we, Kitty?"

"No," said Kitty. "Margaret is the only one of us who could live long in the sort of neutral atmosphere which must pervade a cheap home for women."

"And Margaret is the one of you all who needs the most sunshine," replied Miss Power. "Well, my dears, I have not the least idea to what home you are alluding, but if you don't like it, perhaps you won't have to go."

"That depends," answered Kitty. "Uncle

David Ross came to see us yesterday, and he said he would find situations for Betty and Margaret and me as governesses, or shop-women, or something of that sort. Until he found the situations, we were to live in the woman's home. He thought we could not help ourselves, for of course he thought we had no money. Well, Jessica, he is wrong; you know the very night before father disappeared he gave Margaret one hundred pounds in ten-pound notes—when the earthquake came, and everything that seemed right turned out to be wrong, Margaret took the money back to the solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields, who had written to her. But Margaret thought, she said so, that our jewels were our very own, and we sold them a week ago, and even after paying poor Mrs. Moore we really have a little money left, and we thought we might go and live in lodgings together until the situations are found for us."

"So we can't stay very long with you, Jessica," continued Betty. "For we want to go and search for the lodgings to-day."

“Well, my loves, well, if you carry out your plan, you will have plenty of time to look for lodgings by and by. Now, I’ve sent for you because I want you. I want you both absolutely to devote this morning to me.”

The girls were too polite to express impatience in their voices, but not clever enough to keep it out of their faces.

“Sit down, my loves,” said Miss Power, who read their thoughts easily enough, but did not seem in any way disturbed by them. “Sibyl told you I wanted to see you, did she not?”

“Yes. Oh, what *do* you think, Jessica? Sibyl has engaged herself to Mark Danby!”

Miss Power put her hand into her pocket, and gave Lady Jane’s letter a vicious little pinch. Aloud she said in a calm, unsurprised voice :

“Was Sibyl engaged when she called to see me yesterday?”

“No; she met Mark afterward in the Gardens, and he proposed to her. She was

very late in coming home, and when she returned she seemed fearfully excited, and she said she was engaged to Mark. Maggie had a long talk with her, and Maggie cried dreadfully and wanted Sibyl to give Mark up, but Sib only laughed, and kept on repeating: 'I am engaged, and I mean to marry him, and there is an end of the matter.' "

"Did Sibyl seem happy?" inquired Miss Power.

"Well, Jessica," replied Betty, "everyone who saw them together must have noticed that Sibyl adored Mark. In fact she worshiped him. It was a case of idolatry, on her part at least."

Miss Power not only pinched Lady Jane's letter now; she absolutely tore a little piece out of it as it lay in her pocket.

"How does Sibyl's engagement strike you, Jessica?" asked Kitty. "Do you not think it is just a wee bit heartless of Sib to think of such matters just now?"

"No, my love, I do not. If there ever was a girl possessed of too much heart for

her own peace of mind, that girl is poor little nineteen-year-old. But, my dears, this valuable morning must not be wasted discussing anyone's engagement. Business is business, and there is much at stake. Now tell how much you both know of housekeeping."

After this startling and unexpected turn being given to the conversation, the girls found for a moment or two that their interests hung fire, and they did not guess that Miss Power was really putting them through a very searching examination.

At the end of half an hour she started to her feet with a satisfied expression on her face.

"Now, my loves," she said, "you will kindly wait here while I go upstairs and put on my bonnet."

"Do you want us to go out with you, Jessica?"

"I do; I am going to see your lawyers, Messrs. Rogers & Turner, and I want you to come and introduce me to them. I have ordered a carriage to be here sharp at ten.

Kitty, my dear, you can stand in the balcony and let me know when it arrives. Betty, I have a small task to give you. Here are my last week's accounts, they are somewhat in a muddle. Put them as straight as you can while I am getting ready to go out."

CHAPTER X.

BETTY had really a clear head for figures, but it must be confessed that on this occasion either nervousness, or an overstimulated curiosity as to Miss Power's extraordinary behavior, made her bungle the said accounts in a unsatisfactory manner. Miss Power came back in her black velvet poke-bonnet, with the old-fashioned Spanish black veil, which she always wore, tied loosely round it, a magnificent Spanish black lace shawl on her shoulders, black lace gloves on her hands, and an old-fashioned parasol of dove-colored silk as the finishing touch to her attire.

Miss Power's hair was as white as silver, and she looked a most picturesque old lady when she returned in her quaint dress to the drawing-room.

"Come, girls," she said to the two. She took no notice of Betty's untidy and hope-

less sums, but swept the pair on before her downstairs, and into the delightful carriage which awaited them. Miss Power was very particular about her carriage, and it was a faultless turnout which rolled past No. 80, and out through the gates of Rosemary Gardens. Kitty suddenly laughed aloud. It was the soft feel of the summer breeze flying across her young cheeks which caused this burst of merriment.

“Jessica,” she said, “while I sit here I forget the earthquake. If it would not look too dreadfully *outré*, I should like to hug you this very minute for making me so happy.”

“But you mustn’t do it, Kitty,” interrupted Betty, “for if you do I shall certainly have to follow suit, and what a mess Jessica’s bonnet would get into then.”

“And I want to appear respectable, my loves, when I sit in the presence of your lawyers,” retorted Miss Power, “so, if you please, we will reserve our embraces.”

“Just for one instant, Jessica, give me your

hand to squeeze," answered Kitty, "and then I'll positively promise to sit quiet."

The pair of grays soon brought the party to Lincoln's Inn Fields. In this secluded quarter the noise of the great city sounded dim and far away. At Miss Power's request, Kitty got out of the carriage, and went to inquire if Mr. Rogers was within. He was and, for a wonder, disengaged. In five minutes' time Miss Power and the two girls found themselves seated in his office.

"Kitty, will you have the goodness to introduce me?" said Miss Power. Kitty blushed a good deal.

"Miss Power is an old neighbor of ours, Mr. Rogers," she said. "She lives at 50 Rosemary Gardens. We have known her for a long time now."

"The children have found me odd, but respectable," retorted Miss Power. "I live with an old servant, who is even a little more odd than I am. I keep no cats, no dogs, no parrots. By this abstinence in the matter of pets I prove at once my strength of mind,

and the unique nature of my character. But perhaps, sir, another side of my life and circumstances may interest you more vastly. I am rich."

Mr. Rogers was a very commonplace man. He had been staring at Miss Power in a somewhat quizzical and disdainful manner until she said "I am rich." Then his tone and look both became respectful. Miss Power knew this would be the case, and she longed to have someone to nod to, to express her inward satisfaction.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, madam," said Mr. Rogers. "And—and—I am pleased that these poor young ladies should have the benefit of your wise counsels at—at—this critical juncture."

"It so happens," said Miss Power, "that I have brought my young friends, Kitty and Betty Ross, here to-day solely and entirely for the furtherance of my own purposes. I wanted to be introduced to you, for, being the owner of a good deal of surplus capital, I am anxious to make an investment."

Mr. Rogers's face became eager and absorbed.

"I should be delighted to give you any advice," he said. "Ah—perhaps—would you like the young ladies to go into my waiting-room? My clerk will supply them with some numbers of the *Graphic*, and last week's *Punch*. You are fond of *Punch*, eh, Miss Kitty?"

Miss Power did not give Kitty time to answer.

"I should prefer the girls to remain where they are," she said. "Now, if you please, we will proceed to business. I am given to understand that No. 80 Rosemary Gardens is in the market?"

"Well, yes, my dear madam. You see, in an unfortunate case of this kind the creditors——"

Miss Power interrupted with a wave of her lace-gloved hand.

"Forgive me," she said. "I am not interested in the creditors. The property is for sale?"

“Undoubtedly. It will be sold by auction next week. This day week, I believe; I will ring for my clerk and inquire.”

“One moment first—the furniture is also for sale?”

“Yes. House and furniture go either together or separately—probably the latter. I propose to sell both together, if I can, at Tokenhouse Yard, but if the house alone is sold, the furniture will be put up at auction the following week.”

“And all your pretty things will go to strangers, Betty,” said Miss Power, turning and looking at the young girl.

Betty’s eyes filled with tears. She caught Kitty’s hand in her own, and looked steadily out of the dusty window.

“Auctions are naturally painful things,” proceeded Mr. Rogers. “But under the present peculiarly sad circumstances——”

“Going into the circumstances will neither aid nor hinder the matter in hand,” said Miss Power. “My feelings with regard to auctions are that they are sacrilegious. The

sale of a house and furniture by public auction seems to me almost wicked. I have come here to-day to know if it is necessary to sell No. 80 Rosemary Gardens, with its furniture, plate, china, by auction?"

"By no means, my dear madam, but it seemed the speediest way to realize, and for the sake of the creditors——"

"I *beg* of you, my dear sir, not to go into these side questions. I don't care the proverbial brass farthing for the creditors, but having no other pets, I make pets of these children, and their feelings are sacred to me. Now I have come here to-day to make a straightforward and blunt proposal. But first I must ask some questions. Is No. 80 a freehold?"

"It is, Miss Power."

"That is good. I dislike leaseholds. I hate being worried with yearly ground-rents. Now, what did you expect to realize for the house in Tokenhouse Yard next week?"

Mr. Rogers hummed and hawed.

"I—I—don't know," he admitted. "An



“MISS POWER TURNED SHARPLY TO MR. ROGERS.”

enforced sale is always injurious, and then the situation, for some extraordinary reason, is not popular."

"I beg of you, sir, not to speak against Rosemary Gardens. I reside there."

"My dear madam, a thousand pardons. I have no doubt you find it as salubrious a spot as to be found in London."

"That is neither here nor there, Mr. Rogers. The fact is I wish to purchase No. 80 Rosemary Gardens. I wish to become the owner of the house, the furniture, the plate, the china, linen—in short the whole concern as it stands. I don't want the house and its belongings to go to the hammer. Can we make an arrangement on the spot? But first, perhaps, my dear girls, you *would* now go into the other room, and look at *Punch* for a few minutes?"

When the door closed behind Kitty and Betty, Miss Power turned sharply round to Mr. Rogers.

"Listen," she said. "I don't wish to give a penny more than I can help for this house

and furniture. Name a fair sum, and I will write you a check as soon as ever my lawyer, Mr. Percival, at the opposite side of the road, has examined your title-deeds. Don't overdo it, my dear sir, nor imagine for a moment that because I am wealthy I am also extravagant."

After this speech Miss Power and Mr. Rogers had a rather fierce, not to say angry tussle of words, but in the end the old lady left the lawyer's office with a flushed, triumphant, but pleased expression of face.

"We will go over and see Mr. Percival now," she said to the girls. "Not a word, my loves—not a word at present. The matter looks promising, but it is not concluded. Nothing can be concluded until I have an interview with my friend John Percival."

Kitty and Betty had to sit for nearly an hour in Miss Power's landau while she interviewed her own man of business. She came out at the end of this time, and, taking a hand of each girl in her own, said:

"My loves, we will now go home. I think

I have concluded my business in a satisfactory manner, and I can at least promise you that there will be no auction at No. 80 Rosemary Gardens."

During the rest of the drive the trio were silent. Whatever their feelings, their inward thoughts, their speculations, they gave them no vent in words. When they reached the Gardens and drew up at No. 80, Miss Power for the first time opened her lips.

"What time do you dine?" she asked.

"We don't dine, Jessica," answered Betty.

"We have no cook, Jessica," chimed in Kitty. "Therefore, of course we have no dinner."

"Well, my loves, at what hour in the evening do you all—Sibyl, Maggie, and all—assemble in your drawing-room?"

"Oh, Sibyl is so erratic, we can never count on her."

"You must count on her to-night. Give her my love, and a request from me that she will present herself in the drawing-room of No. 80 at seven o'clock this evening. Maggie

must also be there, and, of course, you two girls."

"Very well, Jessica."

"Of course, you will be alone, remember. I am coming to talk business—solemn, dry technicalities must be gone into."

"Oh, very well."

"What a demure, 'very well' from your lips, Kitty! Aren't you glad there is not going to be any horrid auction—that the furniture and the house are not going to be torn asunder?"

"Yes, yes—so glad that if I speak about it I shall cry."

"Kitty, Rosemary Gardens is after all an out-of-the-way corner of the world; people may be eccentric here if they please. You may kiss me now, Kitty, and so may you, Betty. Good-by, my loves; expect me to-night at seven."

CHAPTER XI.

“THIS drawing-room belongs to Jessica now,” said Kitty, “and I am going to make it bright for her. She is the most wonderful woman I ever came across in my life. She is the sweetest, perhaps the dearest, but I do *not* think she has good taste in the matter of drawing-rooms. Hers is all drab and old china; the old china is splendid, and the drab is artistic, but, somehow, the general effect is dull.”

“And No. 80 never, never at any time looked dull!” said Betty.

“Yes, it did once, Betty,” retorted her sister; “the day Uncle David Ross sat in that chair, and screwed up his short-sighted eyes, and looked as if he thought sunshine wicked. Well, the room shall have all the light we can get into it to-night, and how do my flowers look, Bet? You must not whis-

per it to Maggie, but I spent five shillings on those flowers."

Kitty and Betty had told no one of their adventures that morning. Margaret and Sibyl knew that Miss Power wished to see them in their own drawing-room at seven o'clock. Margaret suggested having tea for the old lady, and Sibyl, who loved her very much, spent threepence out of her own slender purse to buy cream to put into the tea when it appeared. But only Kitty and Betty knew the news which Miss Power would bring, and which would electrify the elder and the younger sister.

At seven o'clock the four girls were all waiting in the drawing-room. Kitty and Betty, who were in the secret, looked very bright and very much excited. Margaret's face was pale, and its expression downcast, but Sibyl was radiantly and quietly happy. The almost feverish excitement of twenty-four hours back had subsided. Something had happened in her life which raised her, for the time being, high above the sorrows

and joys of penury and riches. With this delicious news in her heart she could even go to Uncle David Ross and be happy.

At five minutes past seven Miss Power arrived. Susannah accompanied her across the Gardens. She had very old-fashioned ideas, and did not think it decorous for an aged gentlewoman to be abroad in the evening except in the company of her handmaiden.

Miss Power entered the drawing-room, saluted the girls, and then sat down in a comfortable chair assigned to her.

"Well, Margaret," she said, addressing the eldest Miss Ross, "have Kitty and Betty told you about the little business we transacted together this morning?"

"No," answered Margaret. "They only said that they had taken a drive with you, Jessica."

"They are good girls," said Miss Power. "I did not tell them to keep the thing a secret, but I respect them all the more for showing reticence. Well, my dear Maggie, the little secret is simply this: Before a

week has passed over our heads I expect to be the owner of this house, with its furniture, china, plate, and linen. For goodness' sake, Sibyl, child, don't hold that costly teacup in so careless a fashion! You'll drop it, to a certainty. Remember that cup will be mine before a week is out."

Sibyl did drop the cup without breaking it. She made a rush forward, and kneeling by Miss Power, looked up with her eyes full of wonder at the good lady's face.

"Jessica!" said Sibyl. "Why did you do this? You know you don't want our house and our furniture! Why did you buy them? You see Maggie can't speak. She is half stunned with your news. Tell me quickly why you have bought them, Jessica."

"Softly, softly, little nineteen-year-old! Well, if you must hold my hand, you must. The fact is I made up my mind to purchase this house for a great many reasons. One of them is that I hate houses of this sort, nicely decorated and nicely furnished, to go to the auctioneer's hammer. They do not fetch

their value, and—and—it's hateful to see the furniture that you have a regard for, poked at, and pinched, and criticised by every fat vulgar woman who chooses to come and see it. I know how I'd feel if my feather-beds were shaken up and looked into in that style. That was one reason why I thought I'd buy. I said to myself, 'No. 80 will go cheap in any case, and if it's a freehold I'll have it.' What's the matter, Margaret?"

"Nothing, Jessica. I am only so thankful, and I know you have other reasons."

"Well, child, of course I have. But don't you suppose, you four girls, that all my reasons will please you. They may or may not. There is one thing I am quite certain about—that they will astonish you. You may be a great deal too proud to concur with them. If you are, well, no harm is done. You can go your own ways, and No. 80 is at least as well in my hands as in those of a total stranger. If you like my plan, you all of you have at least a home. Now, just stay quiet, and don't fidget, Miss Sibyl.

How can I speak when you are squeezing my hand in that fashion?"

Kitty and Betty, who had stood a little aloof during the beginning of the conversation, now drew near with their eyes and ears very wide open. It had *not* occurred to them that Jessica's purchase of 80 Rosemary Gardens would provide them with a home. It was good enough thinking of the dear old thing having the place, but this, what *could* this mean?

"Get up, Sibyl, and don't lean on Jessica in that fashion," said Kitty. "Now, Jessica, we are all listening. We are *intensely* anxious and excited."

"Well, my loves, I have bought the house and all it contains for the reasons I have already stated. My further reason I now proceed to disclose. I am a wealthy woman, but I am not one of those who care to fling money away. I consider 80 Rosemary Gardens an excellent speculation, and, with proper management, I mean it to bring me in my seven or eight per cent. Margaret, my

dear, you are a careful, prudent, and wise girl for your years."

"I am twenty-four, Jessica," said Margaret. "It is scarcely likely that I should not have experience."

"That is it, my love; you have experience. You have kept this house for four years."

"Yes, Jessica."

"You have managed the housekeeping?"

"Yes."

"And the weekly books? Oh, I know you have had difficulties, but your own accounts have been straightforward, have they not?"

"Perfectly."

"Betty, you have a taste for figures. You are a very accurate accountant."

"O Jessica, you must not judge by that disordered slate which I left in your room."

"My dear, it is not in disorder now. Susannah wiped it clean before I returned from my drive. Now, loves, I won't keep you any longer in suspense. I mean to turn No. 80 into a boarding house."

Miss Power, having delivered this bomb-shell into the midst of the little party, lay back in her chair, folded her hands, and sat quite silent for a minute. At the end of that time she said :

“No. 80 Rosemary Gardens is to be a boarding house. This is my unalterable decision. If you like, girls, I will go away now, and you can talk the matter out, and explode about it as much as you please. To-morrow morning I can return, and we can discuss the matter in all its bearings.”

“Please, Jessica, stay,” said Margaret. A glow of color had come into her very pale face, and her eyes had the misty look which shows that tears are not far off.

“Child,” said Miss Power. “Does this seem hard to you? But my dear, my dear, good, honest, hard work will be the saving of you.”

“I am not a bit afraid of work,” said Margaret.

“Nor I, nor I,” said Kitty and Betty. Sibyl alone was silent.

“For a long time,” said Miss Power, “I have had an ideal boarding house in my mind. It has seemed to me that cleanliness, and order, and refinement were not incompatible with the term. Now, I want this to be an inexpensive boarding house, and I want lady-girls, who come up to London to work, to live here. I will make the thing pay, for nothing would induce me to consider it in any sense a charity, and you, Margaret, and Kitty shall be the heads. Either you or Kitty shall personally purchase every scrap of food that comes into the house. Either you or Kitty shall receive the visitors, shall superintend the servants, shall make yourself felt in every department of the establishment. Betty shall keep the accounts down to the lowest farthing, and once a week regularly I will audit these accounts myself. And Sibyl shall have the entertainment of everybody in her charge. To Sibyl the girls must look for cheerful and bright evenings, and Sibyl must look after the flowers, and the pretty things generally of

the house. I, of course, provide all the money to keep the establishment going, and, of course, receive every penny of the profits. You four girls, if you agree to my scheme, live here rent free. You have no expense for food or lodging, and I will provide you each with a moderate salary in addition. If you dislike the idea of keeping a boarding house, I know two excellent sisters to whom I can give the posts, and we shall part none the worse friends, I hope. My loves, you are *not* to say anything about what you think to-night. I am going home, for I am dead tired. I'll call in at this same hour to-morrow, and you shall let me know what you have really decided."

Sibyl accompanied Miss Power downstairs. In the hall the old lady put her arm round the girl's neck.

"So you are going to marry Mark Danby," she said.

"I met him yesterday, and he asked me to marry him," answered Sibyl.

"Well, child, it seems to me wonderful



“SO YOU ARE GOING TO MARRY MARK DANBY.”

how any girl can love a man well enough to give herself up to him for life. You do, my dear, I can see that—God help you. It never was my way: I had my chances when I was young and bonny, but I could not see the force of that all-surrender business. And many a time since I have thanked my lucky star that I have remained Jessica Power.”

“Wish me happiness, Jessica,” said Sibyl, in an eager, half-petulant voice.

“Of course I do, my dear. God bless you. There is Susannah coming up the steps. Good-night, Sibyl; Susannah, give me your arm.”

“Of all men in the world I wouldn’t give myself absolutely to Mark Danby,” murmured Miss Power. “Body and soul that child gives herself up to him. There is no saving her; the deed is done. Well, the world will always be full of the worshiping sort of women. They are the ruin of the men, but I suppose there is no help for them. They can’t be drowned like kittens when they are babies, and, as sure as they live to grow up, they

worship. Their idols are all clay, and they suffer. Some are of baser stuff than others; that's the only difference. There's nothing vicious in Mark, but he's a bad sort for a girl to cling on to. He's selfish, and weak, and he's tied to his mother's apron-strings."

CHAPTER XII.

ASHTON MANOR was really only a Manor in name. The house was large, it is true, but there were no grounds to speak of. Ashton, a charming village in Surrey, was surrounded by many really beautiful gentlemen's seats. The Manor was not beautiful. It was a gray old house, squarely and plainly built; too old to boast of any modern conveniences, not old enough to be picturesque. The house, however, was left to Lady Jane Danby by her father. She was a Marmaduke by birth, and as proud of her blue blood as a titled dame could be. She had married the Rev. Philip Danby, a clergyman of the Church of England, a man without any showy gifts. He was poor, and it is to be supposed that, as no woman ever lived who disliked poverty more than Lady Jane, she must have married him for love. He died, however, in the prime of

his youth; some people whispered, because Lady Jane's tongue had been too much for him. He left a son and daughter to the care of their mother, and shortly afterward she went to live at Ashton Manor.

Philippa was the name of the girl; she took after her father: was handsome, frank, and outspoken. She was afraid of no one under the sun, and was in consequence a universal favorite. Mark was also a favorite, although not with equal cause. He had Philippa's eyes without their frankness; all Philippa's passions were intensified in him, but self was not primary in Philippa, as it was in Mark.

Lady Jane Danby was poor, in that refined sort of way which in no sense means privation. The young people had their modest wants supplied. The Manor boasted of a well-kept table, and the domestic service was excellent. Philippa had even her own little pony carriage, and Mark his West End club. Mark was supposed to be reading for the bar just now. He went to town daily. He

sometimes stayed there for weeks at a time with special chums of his own.

It was Lady Jane's nature to grumble, and the young people often wondered what for.

On a certain July morning the three were seated at breakfast. It was Saturday, and Mark did not mean to go to town. Philippa, in a white dress, was pouring out coffee, and eagerly debating her chances in a tennis tournament which was to take place in one of their rich neighbors' grounds that afternoon. Mark was fond of arguing with Philippa; he was saying taunting things now in a lazy voice, and the young lady's cheeks were flushing, and her eyes gleaming angrily.

Lady Jane was absorbed in the contents of a letter which had just arrived by the morning's post. The same post had also brought Mark a letter, and Philippa noticed that he slipped it unopened into his pocket. She was curious about letters, and meant to get at the contents of this one presently.

Now, raising her flushed face, she looked across the table at her mother. Lady Jane

was not pleasant to behold when she was cross, and she looked undoubtedly cross now.

"What's up, mamsey?" inquired Philippa. "Isn't your news pleasant? Who's your correspondent?"

"Philippa, you know I don't wish you to call me 'mamsey.'"

"Well, mothery. Do say something nice to me, mothery. Mark is making himself so disagreeable."

Philippa's frank impertinence generally won the day for her.

"You know, Phil, I would do anything I could for you, but really I am harassed. This letter is from Jessica Power. She won't come."

"Well, let her stay away."

"My dear, that is all very fine, but you know I particularly wanted her to be with us next Saturday. The Vincents are coming, and your cousins Violet and Clarissa Marmaduke. Jessica is a host in herself on such occasions."

"A *power*, you mean," retorted Philippa.

Mark rose, stretched himself, and prepared to leave the room.

"If you are going in for anything in such awful form as bad puns, Phil, I will leave you and mother to discuss this question by yourselves," he said. "You will find me in the library, when you want me."

He shut the door behind him. The moment he had done so, Lady Jane's tone became very serious.

"Philippa," she said, "I am full of anxieties."

"Oh, poor motherly!"

The girl went up to her, put her arm round her neck, and tried to stroke out the furrows on her forehead.

"With all your heedless ways, Phil, you are a good child; you would not add to my cares, I am sure. Philippa, it is most necessary to keep excellent friends with Jessica."

"Well, mother, I thought we *were* excellent friends with her."

"Does it look like it when she refuses my invitation?"

“She may have her reasons.”

“Her reasons ! for not being able to come to the country, from Saturday to Monday, an old maid with nothing to do.”

“Doesn’t she state some cause in her letter ? ”

“She says something about one of those mad schemes she is always taking up. She wants to give the last blow to the respectability of her present address. She tells me she has bought a house in Rosemary Gardens, and means to turn it into a boarding house.”

“A boarding house ? oh, delicious ! Will she manage it herself ? ”

“Philippa ! Whatever Jessica’s faults may be, she is a lady.”

Philippa was silent. She had her own ideas of what constituted a lady, but there were prejudices in her mother’s soul which even she had not the courage to surmount. She skipped round this one now, and said, adroitly :

“No doubt, mother, Miss Power will visit us another Saturday.”

“As if that would do any good, child ! I wanted her for *next* Saturday, for this day week.”

Philippa was silent for a moment.

“I wish, mamsey,” she said then, “that you would confide in me a little bit. Why do you want this queer, unique Jessica of yours to be here at the same time as my cousin Clarissa ?”

Lady Jane was too much interested in her subject to notice Philippa’s use of the objectionable term.

“Because Jessica is rich,” she said ; “enormously rich. It is good to let your cousins know that we are on the best of terms with one so wealthy, so eccentric, so benevolent. That is one reason. The second is this. Jessica always makes a pet of Mark. It will be good for his prospects with Clarissa, or, at any rate, with Clarissa’s father, that he should appear to be a favorite with Miss Power. Then, too, Jessica has great influence over him. Men, my dear Philippa, are molded by women. Mark can be guided

in the direction which will lead to the furtherance of my plans."

Philippa was again silent for nearly a minute. Then she stooped down, and lightly pressed her mother's forehead with her own full red lips.

"Thank goodness for one thing, mamsey——"

"Child, child—that obnoxious word again——"

"Oh, pshaw! let it pass. I repeat, I am thankful for one thing—that you don't make plans for me; but you know better. Ta, ta! now I am off to Mark."

Philippa found her brother sauntering lazily up and down the path which led from the library to the shabby, little pretense of a tennis-court, of which the Manor alone could boast. He did not look up when the girl approached.

"Hullo!" she called, in a gay, semi-boyish manner, "here I come with a budget of news. What will you give me for it?"

"Nothing," answered Mark. "I am worried; I don't want to hear any news."

"Well, let me slip my hand through your arm. You can listen or not as you please. I must unburden myself."

Mark made no reply. Philippa established her slim hand cosily, and began:

"First of all, Jessica won't come. Second, Jessica has bought a boarding house. Whether she will manage it or not personally is at present unknown. Mamsey, being prejudiced, gives a decided opinion on that point, but the fact of her being prejudiced prevents her opinion from being of the smallest value. I incline to the belief that Jessica will be head of her own boarding house, and, if so, I mean to go there the next time I visit London. Why, what is the matter, Mark? How jerky your arm is this morning! You are most unkind to my poor hand."

"I have told you that I am worried about things."

"And so is mother worried. What a good thing Philippa never is! By the way, Marky,

pet, who was that pretty little letter from this morning? The one you slipped into your pocket—you remember.”

Danby colored slightly.

“From one of my tradespeople,” he replied.

“O Mark! Where do bad boys go? I won’t ask you any more questions.”

“I wish you wouldn’t, Phil. I’ve got such a beastly headache I scarcely know what to do with myself.”

“I’m ever so sorry. If I were a model sister, I’d say that I’d like to bear it for you, but, as I’m not, I can’t make myself so agreeable. Good-by, Marky.”

When Philippa was out of sight Danby took the letter which had excited her curiosity once more out of his pocket. He read its contents eagerly, his eyes roving over the words as if he would devour them, and something of that fierce, absolute sense of possession coming into his face which had filled it when he looked at Sibyl in Rosemary Gardens. He was looking at her writing now. When he had read to the end of the closely-written

pages, he turned and went back to the library. He kept an old portfolio in a corner there, and a bottle of ink, and a few bad pens. He sat down with his back to the window, and began to reply to Sibyl's letter. He was not at all a good letter-writer, and now so many conflicting emotions were agitating him that he had less control over his mode of expression than usual.

He tore up several sheets of paper before he wrote a reply to his satisfaction. In the end the letter was very short, and only those who could read between the lines could make much out of it.

I have got yours [wrote Mark]. I am astonished—frightened. What you propose is impossible. I will come on Monday at three. Leave the matter an open question until then.

Yours—

Then followed a string of endearing names, and the letter was signed Sibyl's "devoted lover until death."

CHAPTER XIII.

EVEN deserted gardens have their uses; even weeds can grow apace without being all on the side of bad. The square of ground in the center of that other square which was known as Rosemary Gardens was certainly not a spot to be desired for any attractions of its own on a hot afternoon toward the end of July. In July no London trees look well; the smuts have almost done their worst with them by that time; they look parched and shriveled; in fact, the beautiful creatures are thickly coated with dirt.

The tender green of most young vegetable life makes these same trees worth beholding early in May, but at the end of July all freshness has departed, and they are no longer pleasant to the sight.

Even in May the square of ground in

Rosemary Gardens was a poor place. In July it was positively hideous.

Nevertheless this so-called "garden" had its advantages, for those who went there were as sure of privacy as they would have been many miles from the haunts of men.

About three o'clock on Monday afternoon Sibyl Ross went into the square garden to meet her lover. She had dressed herself with extreme care for the meeting; her dress was of delicate pink cambric; on her head she wore a large, picturesque, black lace hat. The hat had a bunch of pink roses in it.

Sibyl was one of those girls who looked charming in pink. For some reason it toned with her own coloring, making her eyes look deeper and bluer, her complexion more peach-like in its bloom, her hair a ruddier gold than any other color would. Pink made Sibyl look a veritable rosebud. She tripped across the ugly garden now, and in a moment she was in her lover's arms.

Danby was really Sibyl's lover. He cared for her with a fierce passion; he wanted to

have her, to hold her. Life without her seemed insupportable. Such a passion might or might not last, but, while it was paramount in such a turbulent, unruly spirit as animated Mark Danby's breast, it was overmastering in its power.

For a few minutes this pair of young lovers only looked at one another, too happy to be together to care to give utterance to any words. The ugly, deserted garden was to them as if all the flowers of Paradise grew there, and as if all the birds that sang to Adam were making music for their ears.

Sibyl was the first to break the spell.

"O Mark," she said, with a long, deep sigh, "your letter gave me such a fright. I was miserable after I read it."

On hearing these words Mark pulled himself together. He had not come into the square just to kiss Sibyl, and to hold her hand. He had a task to get through—not a pleasant one.

"I want to talk to you very seriously," he began.

“Oh, don’t, Mark! your eyes quite frighten me.”

“Take my hand, Sibyl; don’t look at my eyes. Listen to my words. Sibyl, I have not told my mother yet that we are engaged.”

“Oh!”

Sibyl shrank a little away from Mark.

“I will, of course, my darling, and she’ll thank me for bringing her anything half as sweet as you. But just at present I know she has got all kinds of ideas in her head about me.”

“What ideas, Mark?”

Sibyl no longer leant against Danby. She sat a little away from him, the damask in her cheek’s growing deeper and deeper.

“Why, puss, you are not vexed?” said Mark. “What *are* a mother’s ideas to a man who has given his whole heart to a lovely, bewitching little creature like you? My mother doesn’t know you, Sibyl.”

“But what are her ideas, Mark?”

“Oh, I can’t exactly tell you. I suppose

she would like me to marry some hideous old thing with a lot of money. Not that she has ever said as much. But a fellow can see the way the wind blows."

"Marry the old thing then, Mark. Go away and marry her."

Sibyl had risen; her lips were trembling, her eyes full of tears. She looked prettier than she had ever looked in her helpless, impotent, little rage, which she knew in her heart of hearts she could only keep up for a moment or two.

Mark drew her to him and kissed her again.

"There, that is my only answer to you, Sibyl," he said. "But now I have a serious little matter to talk over with you. I am not going to tell my mother yet that we are engaged, but I will very soon. Sibyl, what *was* that rubbish you wrote to me about you and your sisters turning No. 80 into a boarding house?"

"O Mark, don't you like it? We are ever so pleased and excited. It is dear Jes-

sica Power's doing. She has bought the house and the furniture, and she will find the boarders, and the money to board them with. Maggie and Kitty are to housekeep, and Betty is to be accountant, and I, my dear sir," here Sibyl dropped a bewitching courtesy, "am to represent the ornamental member of the staff. I am to look as pretty as I can myself, and I am to keep the house sweet, and bright, and gay, and I am to entertain the visitors."

"Oh! And how will you entertain them, pray?"

"Why, sing to them, and play to them, and tell gay little stories, and get up round games in the evening. Oh, there are hundreds of ways."

"Doubtless," replied Mark, in a gloomy voice. "And some of the boarders will be young men, perhaps? And you will play and sing for them, and look pretty for them, and keep the house gay and bright, and charming for their benefit?"

"No, Mark; we are not going to have

young men boarders. Jessica does not think that would do. The house is to be a boarding house for girls—lady girls, who know how to act as ladies. And Jessica wishes it to be more than a boarding house. She wants it to be a home.”

“And you are to wear yourself to a skeleton, keeping these maidens amused? I should imagine that of all the trying occupations under the sun, women making endless mirth for one another must be one of the worst.”

“But I daresay there’ll be lots of young men, too, for, of course, the girls must be allowed to see their friends at No. 80, and perhaps some of them, Mark, will be like you and like me. It will be very interesting to watch them.”

“Now look here, Sibyl. This thing can’t be. I have listened to you long enough. My darling, I don’t want to frighten you, but I *cannot* submit to the idea of the girl who is to be my wife wearing herself out as a common boarding-house drudge. For that



“MARK GOT UP NOW, AND ABSOLUTELY TURNED HIS BACK.”

is what it amounts to. Sibyl, if I were to tell my mother that I had engaged myself to a girl who occupied herself in the manner you have just described, it would kill her; it really would. My mother is a proud woman, and she'd simply die of it. I daren't run the risk. Sibyl, I've come here to-day to ask you to give it up."

"But, Mark, we are poor. Dear Mark, be reasonable. Oh, I won't be one scrap less a lady. Dear Mark, don't look at me like that."

"Socially you will be no longer a lady, Sibyl."

Mark got up now, and absolutely turned his back. He walked a few paces away and stood looking gloomily across the ugly garden, poking at the dusty, hard ground with the point of a little cane which he carried.

Now, had Sibyl one scrap of spirit, she would have stolen away at that moment, and given Mark Danby up there and then. But, instead of doing this, the poor little soul sat

crouched up in a corner of the rickety old bench, her eyes growing very big and frightened, and her lips very piteous.

Mark was saying most detestable things; all the best part in her nature cried out against him—and yet—and yet—still he was her idol—her king, and the king could do no wrong. Oh, she hated him! How could he be so mean as to tell her she would not be a lady because she earned her bread honestly? But oh, again, she could not hate him; for he was her very own Mark, to whom she had given herself absolutely and forever.

She raised her eyes timidly, and looked at the back of her hero. Mark had those square shoulders and that well-knit figure which young Britishers adore. Sibyl could not help a small, comforting glow of pride stealing back into her heart, as she reflected that those shoulders and that adorable form belonged to her own acknowledged lover. In a blind little rush and tempest of feeling she had left the rickety bench, and stood in front of Mark.

“I don’t agree with you,” she said. “My ideas and yours are altogether at issue. You asked me to marry you some days ago, and then you knew that my father had fled from the country in dishonor. But you loved me, and you wanted me for myself. When you knew what my father did I could scarcely have blamed you, Mark, if you had never come back to me. When you *did* come, I thought what a prince among men you were. Do you know, Mark, that for years—for at least two years, we lived in that fine house over there on the charity of our tradespeople? We were clothed by them, and fed by them, and we did not pay them. I doubt if they will ever be paid anything beyond a very small percentage. Of course we girls did not do it knowingly; still the fact remains that we did it. When you engaged yourself to me last week, Mark, did it enter into your head that you were going to marry a girl who had ceased to be a lady?”

“That is stuff!” responded Danby.

“Your father is not the first man who has failed: you talk like a child.”

“I don’t. I talk like an honorable woman. I don’t think I was a lady during those years when I lived on what did not belong to me; but I think when I help to take care of Jessica’s boarding house that I shall be the real kind of honorable lady that God meant me to be.”

Danby looked into Sibyl’s eyes. They were always sweet in their expression. Now the suffering soul which filled them brought a light into their depths before which his own fell.

“Look here,” he said, after a pause, in which he had the grace to feel ashamed of himself, “I can’t argue with you, Sib. You may be right, but the world doesn’t look at things in that way, and the fact is you must give up taking any share in that boarding house if you intend to become engaged to me.”

“But, Mark, how am I to earn my bread?”

“Has not your uncle, Mr. Ross, offered you a home?”

“O Mark!”

“My darling, I want you to go there for a little. Not for long, for we must be married soon. Of that I am determined. I come into a little bit of property when I am twenty-five, and if nothing better offers we can start housekeeping on that, only you must not have part or lot in the boarding house scheme, Sibyl.”

CHAPTER XIV.

IT took Margaret Ross and her sisters twenty-four hours to think over Miss Power's scheme. At the end of that time they accepted their own lot in the matter. They did this with a little doubt and a certain amount of hesitation. They did not say to themselves "We are going down irretrievably in the social scale," but nevertheless they felt it, and they took the plunge as one gets into a cold bath—with a little reluctance.

Then came the reaction. They had done right, and their spirits began to glow; their consciences smiled on them, and an easy conscience is seldom unaccompanied by happiness. Day after day they liked the scheme of the boarding house better and better; the social descent was forgotten in the interest of the work itself. A great burden of care seemed to have been lifted from four pairs of

young shoulders, and the girls could laugh merrily, and be so cheerful that censorious neighbors pronounced them heartless.

By the way, it is wonderful how good people preach contentment and resignation in the midst of affliction, and then glare at the afflicted one if he or she happens to wear a smiling face. "Heartless" the victim is instantly designated.

Now the four Ross girls were spoken of as destitute of feeling by a good many of the inhabitants of Rosemary Gardens just then; but, as they did not care what the neighbors thought, this fact did not trouble them.

Finding her scheme was working so admirably, Miss Power threw herself into it heart and soul. She, Margaret, and Kitty spent many long mornings together. The linen-room was overhauled, the china presses were examined, the contents of the glass cupboard turned out. Then came delightful expeditions to different noted shops, where the diminished stores could be replenished, and the house put into apple-pie order.

Miss Power intended the boarding house to be ready for occupation on the first of September, and the girls had just a month to make all their preparations. Maggie once asked rather wonderingly, "Suppose no boarders come?" but Miss Power's dark eyes fairly ran over with merriment on hearing this.

"Oh, my love," she said, "the house will be full, from attic to cellar. You leave that part of the business to me, my dear girls."

The first cloud which darkened the sunshine of the boarding-house idea came from Sibyl. The other girls were perhaps too busy to notice that little nineteen-year-old looked grave when they laughed; that, when she did smile and joke, the mirth was of rather a forced character. The best girls will be selfish in that sort of way when they are very much occupied, and, had any of them guessed how sore poor Sibyl's warm heart felt, they would have cried by the hour with her out of sympathy.

Since her interview with Mark, Sibyl had,

however, managed to elude suspicion, but at last the day came when she felt she must inflict a cruel blow both on herself and her sisters.

The morning post brought a letter from Uncle David Ross. It was a thick letter encased in a square envelope. The front of the envelope was addressed to

MISS SIBYL ROSS,

80 Rosemary Gardens.

The back had "SHORTLANDS" printed in large, ugly capitals across its flap. There was the Yorkshire postmark as well: no one could for an instant mistake the letter.

Sibyl turned pink and then white when she received it.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Kitty. "That letter is from poor old Uncle David. What a shame! We have been so busy we never wrote to the poor old boy to tell him of our change of plans."

"Well, you need not talk of him in that disrespectful way as an old boy," answered

Betty. "I can tell you, he would be angry if he heard you, Kit."

"What care I?" responded Kitty. "Maggie, please pass me the toast; I'm regularly famished. Thanks to Jessica, the old dear can't do us much harm now, and I'm free to speak of him as I please. Oh! shall I ever forget the way he sat and looked round the drawing-room that awful morning he intended to crush us? He'd have done it, too, if it hadn't been for that darling Jessica."

"Sibyl, dear, why don't you open your letter?" asked Margaret. She looked kindly at her younger sister, and noticed for the first time that she was only playing with her breakfast.

"That letter contains a check," said Kitty.

"A check for your second-class fare to Shortlands, Sib. You'll have to send it back to-day. Be sure you write a pretty note of thanks with it."

To the astonishment of the other three Sibyl's reply to this innocent speech was a

burst of tears, a rush across the room, and an absolute collapse into Maggie's outstretched arms.

"What *is* it?" exclaimed Kitty and Betty. "What *is* wrong!"

"Hush," replied Maggie. "The child has a trouble on her. She would not sob like this for nothing. Would you like to be alone with me, Sibyl darling? Shall we go into my little study?"

"For goodness sake, don't leave us out of it?" said Betty. "Aren't we all sisters, and doesn't Sib know that we'd half-kill anyone who was unkind to her. There, Sib, you don't mind my kneeling here and rubbing your cold, shaking hand, do you?"

"And you always did say that Kitty's touch made your headache go away. You don't want poor Kit not to touch your gold locks, Sib?" said Kitty.

"I *love* her to touch them!" said Sibyl, speaking with sudden passion. "Your hand is darling, Betty, and Maggie, oh, Maggie—what the feel of your arm is to me! But I

must go away, I must ; I must go and live with Uncle David Ross."

"You must go and live with Uncle David Ross?" almost screamed Kitty, who was of a very excitable temperament. "Have you gone right out of your mind, Sibyl? Why, you are to stay here, and be the ornament of the boarding house, and Jessica is to pay you forty pounds a year. What *are* you talking in that wild fashion for?"

"I must go to Uncle David," said Sibyl. "It isn't wild, it's true; I must keep that check, and I must go to Shortlands. I must be Muriel's companion. You can't shake me, any of you; I have promised, and I must do it."

"Who have you made this promise to, darling?" asked Margaret.

"To—to—Mark."

"Oh!"

Betty left off stroking Sibyl's hand, and Kitty no longer touched her head; Margaret's arms, however, remained as firmly round her

slight waist as ever, and it was to Margaret she now spoke.

"You know, Maggie, I must do what Mark wishes."

"When you are married to him, perhaps," muttered Betty.

"*If* you marry him!" exclaimed Kitty.

"I must do what Mark wishes," repeated Sibyl, in a dreary tone. Then, seeing the mocking smile on Betty's face, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glowed. She drew herself away from Margaret, and stood erect.

"I love to do what Mark wishes! I dare anyone to prevent me."

"Oh, good gracious!" exclaimed Betty.

"Tell us what you mean, dear," said Margaret, trying to take the excited girl's hand.

"I mean this," answered Sibyl. "I told Mark about the boarding house, and he—he was shocked. And he—he said—I should not be a lady if I did what I—I meant to do. I shouldn't be a lady socially. Mark said I must go and live with Uncle David, and I—

I promised him. Mind, girls, I don't agree with him, but I promised him ; I must and I will obey him, for I love him better than all the rest of the world !”

“ Well ? ” exclaimed Kitty, “ after that, Sibyl, I have only one thing to say, and that is, I'm thankful on my own account ! ”

“ What do you mean, Kitty ? ”

“ That I've not been blessed with a Mark to obey. Come along, Betty, there's no use in our wasting words here. I am sorry for you, Sibyl ; I would not be in your shoes for a good deal.”

Later in that same morning, Sibyl, with red rings round her eyes, wrote to Mr. David Ross, acknowledging his check, and naming the day and hour when she would arrive at Shortlands. When she had finished the first letter she wrote a second. The second was to Mark. In this she gave him her new address, for she was to go to Shortlands in a couple of days' time. In the second letter, too, she was very careful to suppress all her real feeling. She did not allow a murmuring word to escape

her, and took infinite pains to make the dreary future which lay at her door appear as bright as possible to the man she loved.

In a short postscript she did, however, allow her suffering little heart to give utterance to one wail.

“O Mark! write to me as often as ever you can,” said this simple postscript.

Danby got this letter as usual at breakfast-time. He slipped it into his pocket unopened, and read it afterward at his leisure. He thought the letter dull, not to say stupid: Sibyl's old sweet self did not rise before him in a series of little pictures as he read. He wondered why the letter lacked freshness; he tried reading it over twice, and the second time he yawned as he perused it.

At this very moment poor Sibyl's numerous small possessions were being packed away in one or two large trunks, which were to accompany her to Shortlands. The next morning early the other sisters in a body went with her to Euston, and found a dull old lady who did not object to being the pretty girl's escort to

Yorkshire. There were some kisses exchanged, and some very hard squeezes of the hand, and then the train slowly puffed out of the great station, and the three girls, who were to conduct Miss Power's boarding house in Rosemary Gardens, went slowly home. They felt very subdued and sad without little nineteen-year-old, and even Kitty could not be flip-pant for an hour or two. In the course of the morning, however, she was seen to hug herself ecstatically more than once.

"Oh, thank goodness I'm not engaged," she said. On the last occasion she made this remark she was in the linen room counting the new pillow-cases, and Miss Power happened to be not far away.

"Come here, Katharine, and let me kiss you," said the old lady. "Them's my sentiments. But all the same, my love, I expect you will sing another song before the year is out. I never met the girl yet who did not want to be wooed and married and a'——"

"This girl is an exception," said Kitty. "She has Sibyl as a warning."

CHAPTER XV.

SIBYL had to change trains at York. She waited there for half-an-hour, and then traveled by a very slow local train to a small station about three miles away from Shortlands. She was the only passenger who alighted at this station. A girl in a brown holland dress was walking slowly up and down on the platform when the train crept into view. She was a slightly-made girl, with light-brown hair, and light-gray eyes. Her features were thin and sharp, her face pale. On her head she wore a brown hat, trimmed simply with a band of its own color. A more quiet, expressionless little figure could scarcely be imagined.

Sibyl opened the door of her second-class carriage, sprang lightly to the ground, and ran to meet her.

“You are my cousin, Muriel?” she said.

“Yes; had you not better see about your luggage? The train will not stay here a moment.”

“Oh, good gracious!” replied Sibyl, “and I have left no end of things in the carriage.”

Miss Ross flew back again like lightning; she was all animation and brightness and color beside the other girl in her drab clothes.

“Come and help me get my things out,” said Sibyl.

Muriel stood on the platform. Sibyl mounted into the carriage, which she had traveled in alone, and began pulling railway-rugs, a luncheon-basket, a traveling bag, and parcel of umbrellas and parasols, along with sundry books and newspapers out of the wire cage which ran along the top of the compartment. These she tossed into Muriel’s arms, and jumped out herself just as the train began to move.

“Is there no porter about!” she asked.

“Oh, yes, old Williams. He is seeing

about your luggage. Have you many boxes? What a lot of loose things you have traveled with!

“Do you call those many?” asked Sibyl. “I wish you could see Kitty when she is on a journey!”

Muriel made no response whatever to this. She turned, so that her companion could see her in profile (Muriel’s profile was even less attractive than her full face), and waited until Williams, the old porter, appeared, pushing Sibyl’s trunks before him on a barrow.

Williams panted as he walked, and Muriel went gravely up to him, and began an earnest colloquy.

Sibyl stood a few paces behind, holding all her loose possessions.

“Muriel has never said she is glad to see me; she has not even said, ‘How do you do?’” she murmured. Sibyl bit her lips and tried to keep the tears back. In a moment Muriel returned.

“I am sorry,” she said, in her grave, thin, uninteresting voice, “but it will be impossible

to have your trunks conveyed to Shortlands to-day."

"But I really must have some clothes," began Sibyl, aghast.

"I am sorry," repeated Muriel; "but your trunks are so unusually large that they cannot go on the carriage, even though mother did send the brougham with the rail round on purpose. The carrier must bring your trunks. There is no other method."

"Well, can he bring them to-day?"

"I don't think so, but I can inquire."

Muriel returned to consult with old Williams; she came back in a moment.

"Williams says that Dawson, the carrier, only calls here once a week; his day is Friday. He will bring your trunks to Shortlands on Friday. His charge will be half-a-crown, but you can pay on delivery. I am sorry, but there is no help for it. Will you come now? I must not keep the horses waiting any longer."

Sibyl felt herself growing very angry.

"This is Wednesday," she said, "and I am

to do without any of my property till Friday evening ? ”

“ I did not say ‘ evening ’—the carrier may be able to bring your trunks in the afternoon.”

“ Afternoon, or evening, what does it signify ? Am I to do without even a pair of slippers to put on until whenever the carrier arrives ? You must be reasonable, Muriel, and, if my trunks cannot possibly be conveyed to Shortlands sooner than Friday, you must at least allow me to open one of them, and take out a few necessary articles I shall require.”

Muriel looked dubious over this. Opening trunks at a railway station was not in her experience of life. She was a girl who was not fond of new sensations ; she demurred a little, but in the end consented to accompany her cousin into a kind of shed, where the trunks were deposited by Williams, who stood by without offering any assistance while Sibyl unlocked one, and took out in a hurry those clothes she could

least well do without. Muriel also stood by without helping.

“Will you follow me to the carriage now?” she said in her even tone, when Sibyl had supplied herself sufficiently.

As they stepped into the comfortable, well-appointed brougham, Muriel touched Sibyl on her knee.

“You had better give Williams a shilling?” she said. “He has taken a good deal of trouble.”

“In what way, I wonder,” thought Sibyl to herself; but she dropped the coin into the old man’s horny palm without a protest.

The drive to Shortlands was up one dusty hill and down another. A high wind was blowing, and the dust penetrated through the crevices of the closed brougham. It was hot and close inside, and the choking dust made Sibyl sneeze once or twice.

“Don’t you think we might have one of the windows opened a tiny way?” she ventured at last to expostulate.

“I am sorry to disoblige you,” answered

Muriel, "but mother never likes me to sit in a draught. I am not strong."

Sibyl leant wearily back against the cushions.

"Muriel," she said suddenly, when the dust and the heat and the stuffiness had become unendurable, "aren't you going to ask me any questions at all?"

"Well," answered Muriel, calmly, "I don't know that I want to begin just now."

"Why?" asked Sibyl, in surprise.

"You are going to stay a long time with us—to live with us. There will be heaps of time to ask you questions."

"How calm you are?" said Sibyl. She longed to add, "How cold, how horrid, how maddening?" but she refrained.

"May I ask you questions instead?" she asked.

"If you like."

"What do you do with yourself all day at Shortlands?"

"What do I do with myself all day?" repeated Muriel, slowly. "It would take me a

long time to answer that question, Sibyl. I do so many things."

"Yes, yes—well, when you want to amuse yourself, I mean. You give up some part of the day to amusement, don't you?"

"A little time, now and then, perhaps."

"What do you do in the little time?"

"If it is wet, I sit in the drawing room, and read aloud to mother. I am reading 'Alison's History of Europe' to her now. Do you know it? It is in twenty volumes!"

"Good gracious! no, I don't."

"I don't think mother will like to hear you say 'Good gracious,' Sibyl. It is kinder perhaps for me to tell you at once that mother has the greatest horror of all exaggerated expressions. She has taught me never to say a single word more than I mean."

"I am sure you never do that," said Sibyl, with fervor.

"No; I hope I never do. Shall I tell you more about my amusements? On fine days I botanize with mother; or if she is occupied

with her Waif and Stray Society I dig in my own little garden. Are you fond of gardening, Sibyl? Don't you think it is interesting to watch the growth of Nature even in the smallest plants?"

"Look here," said Sibyl, ungratefully, "I'm a town girl, and I don't know anything about country pursuits. I don't want to garden, nor to study botany, nor to read history aloud to your mother. Please let me walk up this hill, Muriel, for, if I don't get some air immediately, I shall suffocate."

Muriel glanced around at Sibyl.

"You look hot," she said; "that is because you have excited yourself. There was no occasion. I don't want you to join in my pleasures; never expected you to like them."

Then she pulled the check-string. The carriage drew up, and Sibyl got out. She almost ran up the hill, she walked so fast. She got the air into her lungs again, and a gleam of hope stole back into her heart. At the top of the hill was a stile, and at the

other side of the stile a narrow, golden-yellow path wandered in a diverse ribbon fashion across a moor; the moor was covered with bracken, and the bracken was showing brown and yellow in patches.

Sibyl's eyes began to dance at this sight, and her heart to move more quickly in her breast.

When the brougham appeared on the summit of the hill she ran up to the carriage window.

"Muriel, where does that lovely path lead?"

"What lovely path?"

"That one at the other end of the stile."

"It leads home—to Shortlands."

"Then I will go that way. Good-by. Oh, someone is sure to tell me how to get to your place."

Before Muriel could expostulate, Sibyl was over the stile, and flying down the path, rendered yellow by the evening sun.

Nearly an hour later a disheveled-looking, untidy girl was ushered by the gray-haired

old butler into the drawing room at Shortlands.

“Oh, I am so sorry, Uncle David,” began Sibyl at once. She walked up to her uncle, who was standing on the hearthrug. “I lost my way on the moor, but it *was* so exquisite, and I found these flowers. May I give them to you, Aunt Matilda?”

Mrs. Ross was a very large edition of Muriel; Mrs. Ross was Muriel stout and middle-aged. She looked at her husband, took no notice whatever of the flowers, but walked two or three steps down the room to meet Sibyl.

“How do you do, Sibyl?” she said; and she pushed her pale cheek forward for Sibyl to kiss.

“How do you do, Sibyl?” said her uncle.

Sibyl looked round for Muriel. She was standing at a little distance, pouring weak tea into cups of rare old china.

“Sibyl,” said her uncle, “we will say nothing about it on this occasion, but it is against the rules of Shortlands for any girl

who happens to be here to venture on the moors alone. You will remember that in future, my dear. Matilda, shall I ring the bell ? ”

“Thank you, David,” responded Mrs. Ross.

The bell was rung, and in a moment the old servant appeared.

“Jonathan,” said Mrs. Ross, “take that rubbish out of the room.”

The rubbish consisted of Sibyl’s flowers.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHORTLANDS was a large, square-built house; it had a wide entrance hall in the middle, and square sitting rooms to right and left. There was the drawing room and the morning room at one side of the hall, and at the other the dining room and the library. The kitchens were underneath in a great, well-drained basement. Mr. and Mrs. Ross thought basements were wholesome, and, notwithstanding the abundance of ground-room, preferred having their dinners cooked under their sitting rooms. Upstairs on the first floor were large, solidly-furnished bedrooms. On the second floor were more bedrooms, less solidly furnished, and above these were the servants' comfortable attics.

There was not an unexpected angle or corner anywhere at Shortlands. The house was built for utility, for service, for a calm

and well-ordered life. In this house Muriel had been born. She had been brought up in it, educated, partly by her mother, and partly by a governess of the old school. Muriel had responded to the pains bestowed upon her in the kindest way; she had been brought up in grooves, and her whole nature now fitted nicely into the space allotted to it. There was no room for outward growth in Muriel's grooves; but then she did not wish to grow.

Sibyl thought that she had never seen any one quite so strange and incomprehensible as Muriel. What Muriel thought about her London cousin was not revealed.

After tea the girls went upstairs to the second floor, where Muriel showed Sibyl the neat, square bedroom which she was to occupy; the bedroom was clothed in drab. In itself it was essentially ugly, but its windows commanded a view of the moor across which Sibyl had walked.

The sun was more slanting now than it had been an hour and a half ago, and there was a

greater glory of color lying across the bracken and the heather. Sibyl's spirits had been down to zero, until Muriel opened the door of her bedroom, and revealed this view to her through its windows. The color and brightness rushed back to her eyes at the sight; her cheeks became rosy red; she clasped her cousin's hand.

"O Muriel, how exquisite! Do come and look!" she exclaimed.

"At what?" asked Muriel.

"The view, the sunset—the color on the moor! Do, do come and look at it."

"You are from London," said Muriel, "and father tells me you never see sunsets there. You will be accustomed to this in a few days."

She twisted her hands out of Sibyl's, and stood on the hearthrug, looking round the chamber. Sibyl perched herself on the window-ledge, pressed her face against the glass and gazed out. After a time she gave utterance to a deep, long, satisfied sigh, sprang lightly to the ground, and, running impulsively up to Muriel, kissed her.

“Thank you for giving me this lovely, lovely room,” she said.

“I wish you would not exaggerate,” replied Muriel. “This is not at all a lovely room: it is plain and neat. Mother says a bedroom should never be more. Please just listen to me a moment, Sibyl, while I tell you about the arrangements. When your trunks come you can hang your dresses in this wardrobe; your linen and smaller articles will go into that chest of drawers in the corner. This deep cupboard, you see, holds your bath, and there is a shelf above for your boots and shoes. Mother will like us both to keep our rooms very tidy. Now I think I will leave you for a little; we dine at seven o’clock. The dressing bell rings at twenty minutes to seven, and we assemble in the drawing room at five minutes to the dinner hour. Good-by for the present, Sibyl.”

Muriel walked out of the room without waiting for her cousin’s response. The moment she had gone Sibyl rushed to the door to lock it: there was no key in the lock.

She looked around her half desperately. At that moment she would have thought very little of dragging the chest of drawers across the room to barricade the door, and so secure her privacy. She refrained from doing this; but she did not refrain from dancing madly on the floor, and pushing her hands through her hair, and even pinching one hand with the other.

“Prison would be better!” she said at last. “O Mark, Mark! what am I not giving up for your sake?”

The thought of Mark soothed and even calmed her. Sibyl was the sort of girl who would sacrifice much for the man she loved—who would glory in her sacrifice, and, up to a certain point, enjoy it. She ceased to dance on the floor, and, going to the window, opened it wide, and leant half out.

The breeze, which had blown dust into her eyes as she and Muriel drove together in the brougham, now brought strength and refreshment. The first gong sounded; she put in her head, and turned to the dressing-table to

make what toilet she could. She was determined now to be brave, to make the best of things, and to look as pretty as she possibly could for Mark's sake. To-night she had no dinner dress to put on, but she could make her wavy golden hair as fluffy, as soft, as picturesque as hair could look. Sibyl had never descended to the adoption of an absolute fringe, but she had short locks curling here and there on her temples, and wavy tendrils of those bright threads of gold would get loose from their pins, and fall about her neck, and nestle round her ears.

Kitty and Betty thought nothing more beautiful than Sibyl's head when she had tossed it into order, as they expressed it, with a pitchfork.

To-night the tossed condition had even a daring appearance: it seemed so out of keeping with the neatness and composure of Shortlands.

But Sibyl had no adornment for this first dinner but her bright hair, and she was determined to make the most of it.

When the second gong sounded Muriel knocked at her door; Muriel's little head looked as if it were clothed in satin. Her light-brown, thick hair was parted in front, and plaited in a tight mass round the back of her head. Not a hair dared to displace itself; all was neatness and order. Muriel wore a brown check silk dress; beside Sibyl she looked the most modest of maidens.

The girls went down to the drawing room without uttering a word. When they entered the room they found Mr. and Mrs. Ross standing together on the hearthrug talking to a young clergyman, who was presently introduced to Sibyl as Mr. Purcell.

"Mr. Purcell is our new curate," whispered Muriel; "you will hear him preach on Sunday. Mother takes the greatest comfort in his ministrations."

It was Sibyl's turn now to make no response. She went over to the window, and gave a faint, impatient sigh when she discovered that no window in the drawing room looked over the moor. Dinner was an-

nounced, and the family migrated into the dining room. Sibyl found herself opposite to Muriel and Mr. Purcell. She could not help observing that Mr. Purcell's dull, gray eyes traveled very often in her direction during the meal. They seemed, as far as she could gather, to wear an approving and even delighted expression. This was some sort of comfort, for Mr. and Mrs. Ross also looked at her constantly, and their eyes expressed the reverse of approval or delight.

Mr. Ross, while he ate his soup, kept his large, prominent eyes so determinately fixed upon the top of her head that she began to wonder if a hair-pin had suddenly taken upon itself to stand up straight.

After dinner Mrs. Ross called Sibyl to her side.

"My dear," she said, "I will ask Muriel to bring you a little bandoline to-night, and will request you to brush some on your hair. Neither your uncle nor I can permit you to sit at table again the show you were this evening."

“Show?” said Sibyl. “But my hair is naturally frizzy, and no girls have smooth heads now.”

“Excuse me, modest girls will always have smooth heads. We won’t discuss this matter any further. Muriel, you might get the ‘History’ and ‘Smith’s Commentary’ ready. Mr Purcell has promised to expound the early history of the first century with the aid of the commentary this evening. Have you got any needlework to do, Sibyl?”

“No,” said Sibyl; “I don’t work much, and anyhow my trunks are at the station.”

“Then, my dear, you can help me this evening. Muriel, fetch the Waif and Stray basket.”

Half an hour later Sibyl found herself seated at a good distance from the lamp, struggling over the intricacies of an old woman’s bedgown. Mrs. Ross was knitting something hideous, which she called a “Hug-me-tight.” Muriel’s fair, shining head was bent over a cambric handkerchief which she was embroidering; Mr. Ross sat in his arm-

chair and went to sleep, and Mr. Purcell, with the lamplight revealing all the plainness of his features, read history aloud. He read in a very correct, monotonous voice, rounding his periods nicely, and availing himself of every stop. As he read, Sibyl threw down her bedgown and watched him.

“How comical it all is!” she said to herself, and her eyes grew brimful of mirth and her lips quivered.

The electricity of her gaze communicated itself to the reader. His voice faltered; he raised his eyes, glanced at her—a warm, delightful feeling filled his breast, and a pink blush overspread his features.

Sibyl resumed her needlework, and for the first time Mr. Purcell found Shortlands interesting.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE best-laid plans sometimes come to nothing, and Lady Jane Danby, whose principal object in life just now was to secure a suitable wife for her son Mark, was doomed to see the summer glide into autumn, and even the first tokens of early winter set in before she saw any likelihood of having her plans fulfilled.

Clarissa and Violet Marmaduke were the daughters of Lady Jane's brother; not her eldest brother, who inherited the title, but a younger one, who had married an immensely rich wife, and whose two girls were the sole inheritors of their mother's fortune. Clarissa was the eldest, and Lady Jane thought that she would make an excellent wife for Mark. She had thought this for some time, and had laid her plans with a good deal of diplomacy. The young people had met in Switzerland

the summer before ; they had not been thrown together, but had got into the habit of falling into each other's company a good deal. They talked and laughed and flirted after the cool fashion in which cousins can flirt, when they are so inclined, and Lady Jane's hopes were high.

Clarissa's father was the owner of a splendid place in Cornwall, and Lady Jane broadly hinted that Mark and Philippa should spend Christmas with their cousins. Strange to say, the hint was disregarded. Lady Jane thought hard during the spring and early summer ; it was so necessary for Mark to marry money, and Clarissa was just the girl to bring him distinction in every way. Lady Jane resolved to ask her nieces to Ashton Manor, to get Jessica Power to be one of the party, and by hook or crook to have the young people engaged to one another before Clarissa left her house.

It was not a particularly honorable idea, but Lady Jane's honorable connections were more numerous than her thoughts.

For some reason, which she was never able to discover, Clarissa and Violet promised to come to the Manor, and then day by day and week by week deferred their visit. The excuses they made were excellent. Violet had a bad cold, Clarissa had to accompany her mother to Sweden, but they *would* come—oh, yes!—they wanted to spend a little time with dear Aunt Jane, and dear Philippa and Mark.

At last, in October, Lady Jane's hopes once more suddenly revived. Clarissa wrote to say she would be with them that evening. She must make her visit alone, for Vi was at Brighton with mother.

"Mark," said Lady Jane, "Clarissa is coming down by the 3:30 train from Waterloo; you'll be sure to meet her and escort her down, won't you?"

Mark, who was fond of Clarissa, looked pleased and interested.

"Of course I'll meet her," he said. "It's rather a bore her choosing such an early train, for I had made an engagement for that

very hour; but never fear, mother, I'll be at Waterloo in good time."

Mark left the room as he spoke. Lady Jane turned to Philippa.

"At last!" she said, with a sigh.

"Well, mother," replied that young lady, "if I were you I'd leave 'At last!' alone, for, in my opinion, it has not arrived yet."

"Nonsense, Philippa, you speak without a bit of heart. You don't know how devoured with anxiety I am. All my life I have striven to do my very utmost for Mark. I have denied myself for his sake. When I see him married to his cousin Clarissa, I shall be happy."

"Dear me, mamsey, I hope you'll be happy whoever Mark marries."

"What do you mean, miss? *Whoever* Mark marries? He is as good as engaged to Clarissa this minute."

Miss Danby stuck her hands into the pockets of her tailor-made jacket—she was dressed for going out at the time—and, turn-

ing on her heel, whistled a bar of "Sweet-hearts."

"Philippa, your unladylike conduct nearly maddens me."

Philippa stopped whistling at once.

"Dear mother," she answered, "you know I would not really vex you for the world, but how can I help giving vent to astonishment when I hear you say that Clarissa and our Marky are nearly engaged?"

Lady Jane almost sprang from her chair.

"Marky! How can you speak of your brother in that way? It's enough to put Clarissa against him."

"Oh, no, it isn't; she's not that sort, by any means. Now, mother, will you listen to a word of advice from this wild, impertinent, boyish daughter of yours?"

"Well, my love, you know I'm very fond of you, Philippa, although you do try me so often."

"Of course, mother, I know that. Now do listen. Leave Mark and Clarissa alone. *Don't* throw them together, and *don't* look at them with that expression on your face which

says so plainly, ‘Oh, my children, come and kneel to me for my blessing!’ Just let things alone—*do*, if you want anything to come of this. But I fear, I fear, I fear!”

Philippa ran out of the room, and Lady Jane, left to herself, wept some angry tears. She thought her daughter one of the most trying of mortals.

Mark accompanied his cousin down to Ashton by the 3:30 train. They arrived at the Manor just in time for afternoon tea. Everything was looking its best; the drawing room was bright with autumn leaves and flowers, a cozy fire crackled on the hearth, and Lady Jane, in dove-colored silk and soft white lace, looked aristocratic enough to be anybody; the tea equipage was of the choicest, the tea of the most fragrant, and Mark led Clarissa in with all the *éclat* which the occasion demanded.

The weather was cold enough for furs, and Clarissa was clothed up to her delicate, fair throat in sable. She had a sable cap on her head, and her eyes, which were large and dark

in color, were full of eager expectation. If she was not in love with Mark, she liked him—even Philippa had to admit that.

The party sat round the hearth, and chatted and laughed. Clarissa gave a ludicrous account of the many reasons which had prevented her coming sooner to the Manor.

“I wanted to come,” she said, looking up innocently and affectionately at Mark; “for you know I promised to pay you a visit in your own house this summer. Don’t you remember, Philippa how we planned it all that evening at Lucerne? Oh, yes, I wanted to come, and so did Vi, for that matter, but so many things came in the way, and last of all, there was mother’s illness. Oh dear, oh dear, the summer has gone, and I have not redeemed my promise!”

“You have done the best you could, my love,” said Lady Jane. “You are here now, and we can forget the past while we enjoy the present. We’ll keep Clarissa as long as we can, won’t we, Mark?”

“I hope so,” answered Mark. He was

looking at his cousin with undisguised admiration.

The color mantled into her cheeks under his gaze. She tossed aside her fur cap, and unfastened the warm sables round her throat. She was a very beautiful girl, very bright, fresh, and sweet; it was impossible for all present not to be charmed with her.

At dinner Clarissa wore white, and Mark looked particularly handsome in his evening dress. He did not wear his evening dress on ordinary nights, but he thought it only right to pay this little mark of respect to his cousin.

"She's handsomer than ever," he said to himself; "and I don't think I'm conceited when I fancy that she likes me. Of course it never can be anything but cousinly affection," and Mark gave the ghost of a sigh, and made up his mind to be intensely virtuous during the evening.

He had forgotten to write to Sibyl that day; a letter of hers—a sad letter, too—lay unanswered in his pocket.

All these young people could sing, and



“ PHILIPPA MADE ONE OF HER ABRUPT OBSERVATIONS.”

after dinner they crowded round the piano, and had a gay time. They tried a few trios, then Philippa sang alone, then Clarissa sat down to the piano, and presently she and Mark had the musical part of the entertainment to themselves, for Philippa left the room to attend to the wants of a sick Sunday scholar, and Lady Jane was far too worldly wise to approach the piano.

Clarissa's voice blended beautifully with Mark's, and they sang several love songs with great feeling together.

Just before bedtime, when the four were standing round the fire, and Mark's eyes were traveling very often in the direction of Clarissa's, Philippa made one of her abrupt observations.

"Cook has just told me that she is going out to the pillar-box with a letter of her own. If yours is ready, she will take it at the same time, Marky."

The suddenness of this attack, joined to the dancing light of mischief in Philippa's eyes, threw Mark completely off his balance.

“Mine ready? What do you mean?” he asked, with an uneasy laugh.

“What I say, my dear boy. You write a letter every night and post it. Cook can save you the trouble to-night if it is ready, that is all.”

“It is not ready,” he answered. And he turned on his heel. He could have bitten out his tongue the next instant for having avowed the existence of the nightly letter. He felt afraid almost to glance at Clarissa, but when he did look at her again, her face was calm. She had observed nothing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARK had not then the least intention of flirting with his cousin. In his heart of hearts he was true to Sibyl. He loved her better than any girl he had ever met. Sibyl without money would be a better wife for him than the richest maiden of his day. Still, Mark was not the most constant of human beings. He had a very fine figure and a handsome face, but he had not a particularly strong order of mind. Clarissa was very pleasant to talk to, very pleasant to look at. He could not help being impressed with the idea that she liked him with something more than cousinly regard. He was not conceited enough to suppose that she was madly in love with him, but he thought that a very little effort on his part would make her so. Clarissa was too handsome and too rich not

to have had many offers of marriage, but she evidently had never cared for anyone sufficiently to say "Yes." As Mark watched her face, he used to wonder, in case he said the fateful words, if she would say "Yes" to him.

Lady Jane had sufficiently profited by Philippa's advice to leave the young people to themselves. She felt happy during these days, for, although Mark did not mean to flirt, he was undoubtedly attentive, and that other affair about which she had once received some dark hints, that "common kind of girl" who lived somewhere in Rosemary Gardens, about whom she had written to Jessica, surely Mark had forgotten all about the girl long ago.

When Clarissa had spent nearly a week at the Manor, the letters were brought in one morning as usual at breakfast-time. Philippa had two, Mark one, which he slipped into his pocket, and Lady Jane received three or four as her share of the post-bag. Clarissa had no letter to read that morning,

and she noticed, with a kind of lazy wonder, how Mark popped his out of sight, and how Lady Jane and Philippa devoured theirs.

Meeting Mark's eyes, she bent forward and spoke :

"How unlike a woman you are, Mark," she said. "Women can't bear to leave their letters unread."

Mark colored as she addressed him.

"Your letter was a bill, wasn't it, Marky?" suddenly exclaimed Philippa, raising her eyes from her own epistle. Then she continued, without listening for his reply :

"Oh, mothery, Clarissa, and Mark, do listen ! I have got such a delicious letter from dear old Jessica Power. Her boarding house is started, and she incloses me a prospectus. Here it is: 'No. 80 Rosemary Gardens. Boarding house for girls,' and here is the tariff of terms. I tell you what it is, I mean to go to that boarding house. Clarissa, suppose we go up there together? You know you want to do some shopping. Suppose we go to-morrow, and spend two or

three days? What is it, mother? Do you object?"

"Of course I do, my dear. Do you think my brother would permit Clarissa to go to a common boarding house? Boarding houses are always low, second-rate kind of places."

"But this is not low, nor second-rate, nor common. This is Jessica's boarding house, her own little pet investment, paid for and provided out of her own money, and the girls who manage it are quite ladies, as good as I am, Jessica says."

"Well, my dear, well, but I don't think Clarissa's father would wish her to go to any place of the kind."

"I am sure he would not," murmured Mark, whose face had suddenly grown very white.

"I don't think father would mind in the least," interrupted Clarissa. "Neither he nor mother are at all faddy, and they like us to go about and see life."

"Besides," continued Philippa, "Jessica says that no girl will be admitted to the

boarding house without an introduction, and that the sole qualification necessary is that she shall be a lady. Poverty is nothing, Jessica says, but gentle ways and gentle birth are essential."

"Just like Jessica," murmured Lady Jane. "She will probably fill her house with genteel paupers."

"Well, mamsey, we'll pay, if we go. *Do* let us, *do* say yes—just for two days, mamsey, love! Clarissa come, come and coax with me. You know mother can refuse you nothing!"

"Do let us go," said Clarissa, in her soft voice.

Lady Jane looked at her pretty niece in a sort of bewilderment. Then she glanced at her son.

Mark shook his head, and formed "No" with his lips.

"Mark agrees with me," said Lady Jane.

The color deepened all over Clarissa's face when her aunt said this.

"I am of age," she said, pouting her rosy

lips, "and I know my own father and mother would let me go. If you wish, Aunt Jane, I can telegraph to them."

"Oh, no, my love, not if you are sure, and your heart is set on this."

"Of course her heart is set on it, mamsey," interrupted Philippa, "of course we'll go, we'll both go. It will be a delicious new experience. Put on your hat at once, Clari, and we'll run up to the village and send a wire to old Jessica."

"Philippa, you get more slangy in your expressions every day," exclaimed her mother.

"I don't care; I must let off steam somehow! Now then, Clarissa, pet, we'll fly off and get this affair arranged in double-quick time."

The girls rushed out of the room.

"How impulsive Philippa is," Lady Jane said, looking at her son.

"Yes," he answered, in an abstracted manner. Then he added, "You're not going to let the girls go to that boarding house, mother?"

"I don't know," she said. "How am I to prevent it? Clarissa, as she remarks, is of age, and your uncle George, her father, always had eccentric views about all men being brothers, and that sort of thing; provided the boarding house was respectable, he would be sure to let her go, and if we oppose her she will only telegraph for leave. As she goes, Philippa may as well go with her, eh, Mark?"

"Certainly," remarked Mark. He went to the door, turned the handle, hesitated, and came back again.

"Mother," he said, "you are clever. Can't you *manage* to keep the girls from going to 80 Rosemary Gardens?"

"My dear Mark!"

"The fact is, I know the place."

"You know it? But this boarding house of Jessica's has only just been opened."

"I know the people who live there."

"Do you? Who are they?"

"Their name is Ross. Their father——"

"I know," exclaimed Lady Jane, impulsive.

ly. Then she remembered some rumors she had once heard about Mark, and wondered that she could ever have doubted her boy.

“My dear fellow,” she said, “I dare say the daughters of this unfortunate man are in themselves blameless, and if Jessica has taken them under her protection—Well, well, Mark,” seeing a cloud still on her son’s brow—“I cannot too much admire your anxiety about your sister, and your”—she looked up in his face—“cousin,” came out slowly and with meaning. “If I can keep the girls at home, I will, Mark. And now, my son, let me ask you one word. You know my wishes, my longings, and desires. Have you made any progress?”

“No, no, none. I wish you would get this idea out of your head, mother.”

He spoke crossly, and left the room in by no means a good temper.

If Mark had told his mother to dismiss the idea she had suggested, he by no means banished it from his own head. Through the day it stayed with him, and the more he

thought of it the more did it fascinate him. Still in his heart did he love Sibyl best. "If they both had money, I would not hesitate a minute which I should choose," he said; "but Clarissa is very sweet—and these duns—they do press me awfully, and how am I ever going to confess the fact to the *mater* that I am hundreds of pounds in debt?"

Mark spent a very uncomfortable day. He went to town, but found it impossible to turn his attention to dry treatises on law. He spent but a short time at his chambers and returned by an early train to Ashton. Clarissa was walking by herself in the garden. He could not help joining her, and looking at her a good deal oftener than he ought, and coming to the conclusion that, in her way, she was just as pretty as Sibyl.

It was growing dusk, for the days were very short, and nothing in the world was easier than for a young man like Mark to say soft, pattering words in a meaning voice to a girl like Clarissa, in the soft, dusky light. No one could have received those nothings

with more appreciation than she did. When they entered the house Mark was more certain than ever that if at any time he did ask an important question of his rich cousin she would give him a favorable answer.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE boarding house was a splendid success. It was opened on the 1st of September with great *éclat* by Jessica herself. On this occasion it did not look the least like a boarding house. The window-boxes were all full of fresh flowers; the balconies were laden with them, and on the balconies the girl-boarders stood, and talked to one another, and wondered what strange thing had happened to them, and how they could possibly manage to attain for thirty shillings a week such an artistic and luxurious home.

The boarding house, with its bright young hostesses, soon became popular, and, as Jessica had predicted, was quickly filled from attic to cellar. The prices charged varied according to the floors, girls who had very small means being accommodated with bedrooms in

the bright, freshly-painted attics for a pound a week.

“And there will be no extras,” Jessica insisted. “You understand me, Maggie, I am quite resolved on that head. We will name a price to each girl and stick to it. And remember, when the evenings get chilly, each of the girls is to have a fire in her bedroom, and there is always to be a supply of fresh candles, and a book or two lying about; for I want the lassies to regard their bedrooms as real homes, where they may rest, and be happy as circumstances will allow them.”

Of course with these rules governing the establishment, and love and peace, and a sense of pleasant, homely luxury which pervaded the very air of the house, it could not help being more than popular.

Maggie, to whom all the letters were addressed, had a great many more applications for her rooms than she could accept. She felt quite sorry to have to write so very often in reply to the pleading letters, that the house was full, quite full. Jessica Power talked

seriously of buying the next house as soon as ever she had the chance, and so adding to the capacities of the boarding house.

"I am truly sorry for the girls who can't come," Kitty said. "I feel convinced that no girls who are away from their real homes could be happier than those who live with us. These fresh country girls, with all their lives before them, are too delicious; their enthusiasm quite carries me away."

"Of course you have no enthusiasm yourself, Kitty," remarked Betty, in a sly voice.

"None, Betty, in comparison with the Hopkinsons, and two Macjones girls, from Wales. Gladys Macjones told me last night that she quite expected to be initiated into the mysteries of art in three months; and Mary posted a sonnet to the editor of the *Nineteenth Century* a couple of days ago. She hopes Gladstone will notice it. Oh, they expect so much—those Hopkinsons and Macjoneses—nothing—nothing in all the world seems impossible to them."

While the girls were chattering, Miss

Power walked into the room. She had now got accustomed to crossing the square without Susannah's company. She had only thrown a shawl over her head to come over to No. 80, and now she tossed it on the sofa of Maggie's little private sitting room.

"Well, Kitty, what are you all smiles about?" she asked.

"We are so happy," replied Kitty. "The boarding house is a merry sort of place, and the girl boarders are full of interest."

"But we miss little Nineteen-year-old," remarked Miss Power. "The place would have been still merrier if she had not left us. Do you often hear from the child, Margaret?"

"Yes," replied Margaret. "She writes regularly once a week."

"I trust she is happy?"

"I hope so," answered Margaret, "she writes cheerfully enough, and makes us laugh over Uncle David's funny ways. Still—" Margaret was about to add something further, when one of the servants brought in a tele-

gram. She opened it and read its contents, and then handed it to Miss Power.

“We cannot take them in,” she said; “the house is quite full.”

Miss Power read the telegram over twice. The first time her lips twitched; the second time her eye smiled.

“Why, Maggie,” she said, “this telegram is from Philippa Danby—Mark Danby’s sister—and the girl she wants to bring with her is Clarissa Marmaduke, one of the greatest heiresses of the day, and niece to the Earl of Silchester.”

“Well,” repeated Maggie, “I am sorry, but the house is full from attic to cellar. You don’t want me to turn anybody out, do you Jessica?”

“Yes, my love, I do. I would not refuse Philippa’s request for all the world. Philippa is one of the best girls I know, and it is too rich her wanting to come here. It is my belief, Margaret, and Kitty, and Betty, that that scoundrel Mark has never told his sister or his mother of his engagement to our little

Nineteen-year-old. Won't we take it out of him just ! My dear girls, I wouldn't be engaged to a man like Mark Danby for all creation, but as Sibyl is his affianced wife, and as, for some incomprehensible reason, she likes him, we may be able to do her a good turn when those girls come here."

"But the house is full," repeated Margaret.

"Yes, yes, my love. Now the question is, who can we best turn out ? Where do the Macjoneses sleep, Betty ?"

"They have the back attic between them," replied Betty. "Their two tiny beds are stowed away under the roof. I must say they have a rather confined space, but they enjoy themselves immensely, and then you know we only charge them fifteen shillings a week each."

"I will ask the Macjoneses to sleep at my house for two or three nights," replied Miss Power. "Susannah shall get a room ready for them ; it shall be on the drawing room floor."

"But, Jessica, we cannot ask Miss Danby and that other girl to sleep up in the back attic. It really sounds too dreadful."

"My dear, it does not sound dreadful at all, and Philippa will enjoy it."

"But could you not ask her and Miss Marmaduke to use your bedroom on the drawing-room floor?"

"No, my dear, no. What novelty would there be in that to those girls? Let them have the attic; they will be enraptured."

So Maggie had to fill in her telegram in the following way:

House full. Only a clean back attic, with two beds, to spare. Shall I reserve it?

In the course of a couple of hours a second telegram was received at 80 Rosemary Gardens. It ran as follows:

Will take the back attic. Expect us to-morrow evening.
PHILIPPA DANBY.

At the appointed hour Philippa and Clarissa made their appearance. Clarissa looked a little shy, Philippa gayly expectant. Clarissa

was accustomed to the best hotels ; to suites of rooms on the first floor, engaged in advance. She would have been quite cool and composed and uninterested in one of these rooms, but the back attic, with the little bed pushed away under the roof, made her feel shy.

“Good gracious, my love,” exclaimed Philippa to her cousin, as they stood in their humble room and looked around them. “Did you notice that all the girls in the house are dressed for dinner ? I met groups of them on the stairs, all rigged out in diaphanous drapery. Are they giving a party here ? What is going to happen ?”

“I have not brought a stitch of anything for the evening,” said Clarissa. “It never occurred to me it was necessary in a boarding house, and Aunt Jane did snub this one so. And then that telegram offering us the back attic.”

“My dear, the back attic is delicious, heavenly ; we shall see half over London from that dormer window. But now, Clari, about our dress !”

“ I have nothing, Philippa—nothing whatever. I am clothed from head to foot in blue serge, and I have got a brown serge in my port manteau, in case this one gets soaked, if I’m caught in a shower. That is all.”

“ Have you got a bit of jewelry—a gold locket and chain, or anything of that sort ? ”

“ No, this dull steel brooch fastens my dress at the throat. I did not even bring my watch-chain, for I slipped my watch, for convenience, into my leather bracelet.”

“ It was the back attic,” ejaculated Philippa. “ I also am in blue serge, and my watch reposes in a bracelet. Well, there is no help for it; let’s brush out our hair, wash our hands, and come down. I hope there is a good dinner, for I am so hungry.”

The two girls tripped downstairs, hand in hand. Philippa was tall and slender; her figure was very neat, her black hair crisp and wavy; her pale face redeemed from plainness by the vivacious expression of her sparkling, mischievous black eyes. Clarissa was small. Her complexion was very fair,

but her eyes were large and dark, and seen by daylight had a peculiar red-brown in their coloring, which gave them a particularly bright and lovely expression. Her hair was fair, and had also a very faint dash of red about it. Clarissa was pretty enough even to carry off the effect of her heavy serge dress.

Kitty, in white cashmere, came forward to meet the two girls when they entered the drawing room. Kitty had not at all the manners of the ordinary boarding house.

“It was sweet of you to come,” she said, taking a hand of each. “I was dreadfully distressed at putting you into the back attic, but Jessica said you would not mind. Forgive me, I don’t know one of you from the other. Which of you is Jessica’s friend?”

“I am,” replied Philippa. “I have known Jessica since I was quite a small tot; she is a dear, generous, eccentric old soul, and I admire her immensely. Miss Ross, may I inquire why you are gazing so fixedly at me?”

“You are like your brother,” replied

Kitty. "Like him, yet different—very different." Here she sighed.

"Good gracious! You don't tell me you know Marky?"

"Oh, yes, we all know Mr. Danby very well. What part of the room would you like best to sit in? I beg your pardon—I don't quite hear what you are saying?"

"You are welcome to listen to the solitary sentence I let escape my lips, Miss Ross. I was saying to myself, 'Nuts to crack with Marky, by and by.' You will perceive by the style of my speech that your delightful back attic suits me perfectly. Now what were you good enough to ask me a minute ago?"

"What part of the drawing room would you like best to sit in?"

"Clarissa and I will choose a little humble corner where we can sit unobserved. We had no idea you were entertaining company to-night."

"Nor are we—oh, you mean that the girls are in light dresses. We who live here gen-

erally put on something cool in the evenings. It is refreshing to change our heavy dresses, and good economy besides, for we can wear out our old summer frocks in that fashion."

"I am so sorry that my cousin and I must appear in these heavy serges."

"Oh, it does not matter at all!"

"We thought yours was an ordinary boarding house."

"Which it is not," replied Kitty, her eyes sparkling. "Here is a very cozy corner, Miss Danby, and may I introduce my sister Betty to you? Betty, here is Miss Danby, and here is Miss Marmaduke."

"I am sure you must be hungry, both of you," said Betty, when she had shaken hands, and found out for herself the likeness between Philippa and Mark.

"I am starving," replied Philippa. "I won't answer for Clarissa; she must speak for herself."

"Well, the dinner gong will sound in a moment," replied Betty, "and after dinner will come our pleasantest time."

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was a great sameness about life at Shortlands. Breakfast was at eight punctually, lunch at one, tea in the drawing room at four, and dinner at seven. These four meals constituted the pillars of the day. They were colossal pillars, and could never be moved a quarter of an inch in any direction. Trains might be missed, relatives might die, hearts might be broken, but at one to the minute Mr. and Mrs. Röss must seat themselves at the head or foot of the luncheon table; Muriel, smooth and composed, must occupy one side; Sibyl, crossed and ruffled, the other. Luncheon was but a sample of all other meals; the knell of doom must, indeed, have gone forth before these important ceremonies could be disorganized.

The method observed in connection with the meals was carried into all the minor de-

tails of the household. At Shortlands there was not only a place for everything and everything in its place, but also a time for everything and everything done in its own time. For instance, Muriel's walking hour was from eleven to twelve every day. Muriel liked to be out at eleven, and to be wiping her feet on the mat as the great eight-day clock in the hall struck twelve. From two to half-past three she gave herself another hour and half of exercise, either on foot or in the brougham.

Every moment of this young lady's day was planned. She studied geology and history from nine to ten; from ten to five minutes to eleven she practiced. From five past twelve to five minutes to one she made garments for the poor. After four o'clock tea she either read aloud to her mother or embroidered pocket handkerchiefs for herself; after dinner she resumed her embroidery. The embroidering of her own name on pocket handkerchiefs seemed to Sibyl to be the only light occupation in which Muriel indulged.

One day passed exactly like another, except that on wet days Muriel took her constitutional exercise in the picture gallery, where she diverted her mind from frivolous thoughts by committing to memory large portions of epic verse. The evening was the only time when the solemn routine of life at Shortlands was allowed to be broken.

On a certain Thursday evening each fortnight Muriel bade her parents a dutiful good-night as the clock struck nine, and tripped out of the room.

“Muriel goes to have her hair washed,” Mrs. Ross remarked to Sibyl. “She has to sit by the fire afterward, and have it properly dried. It takes just an hour to dry Muriel’s thick hair.”

On every second Thursday Muriel’s hair was washed. On the alternate Thursday also this good girl absented herself just an hour before the family retired to rest. On this occasion she descended to the house-keeper’s room to put the coachman through his letters. As far as Sibyl could make out,

the coachman never seemed to advance beyond this rudimentary branch of education. This was certainly owing to no fault of Muriel's, who gave him his full hour, no more and no less, of instruction every fortnight.

Into this placid home, Sibyl, the unruly, the undisciplined, the untamed, suddenly found herself plunged. At first the routine life had a paralyzing effect upon her. She was swept along on its current; she recognized its power; she made violent efforts to conform herself to Muriel's ways; she tried to brush her frizzy hair smooth; she made valiant efforts to read dull books; she heroically listened to Uncle David's stupid stories, and to Aunt Matilda's ceaseless talk about waifs and strays.

This kind of thing lasted for a long time; then Sibyl's patience burst its bounds; she electrified this good, excellent family by displaying a decided fit of childish bad temper and naughtiness at the breakfast table. The special incident which showed Sibyl in her true colors took place at the breakfast table.

The letters were brought in by Jonathan, and placed in a locked bag by Mr. Ross's side. With all the method of the house there was an aggravating want of method in the opening of the letter-bag. Mrs. Ross and Muriel scarcely ever held communication with the world, and Mr. Ross, who thought his letters could keep until he had time to attend to them, often kept the bag locked until he returned from his tour round the farm.

Now, however, eager eyes watched for the unlocking of that bag, for Sibyl's almost daily letter from Mark was the sole bit of sunshine in her present dreary life.

One morning, when she had been nearly a fortnight at Shortland, Mr. Ross kept the locked bag beside him while he read a long account of a shareholders' meeting out of yesterday's *Times* aloud to his wife and family. Mrs. Ross and Muriel were deeply interested, and only Sibyl's hungry blue eyes looked past the *Times* at the locked bag.

Mr. Ross suddenly started to his feet.

"My dear," he said to his wife, in a shocked voice, "what have I been thinking of? It is three minutes since my usual hour for visiting the stables. Muriel, take the letter-bag to my study. I will not wait to open it now."

"But, uncle," exclaimed Sibyl, in a piercing loud tone.

Mr. Ross left the room without taking the least notice. He was a little deaf, so he may not have heard her.

"I must run after Uncle David," exclaimed Sibyl, "for I want my letter."

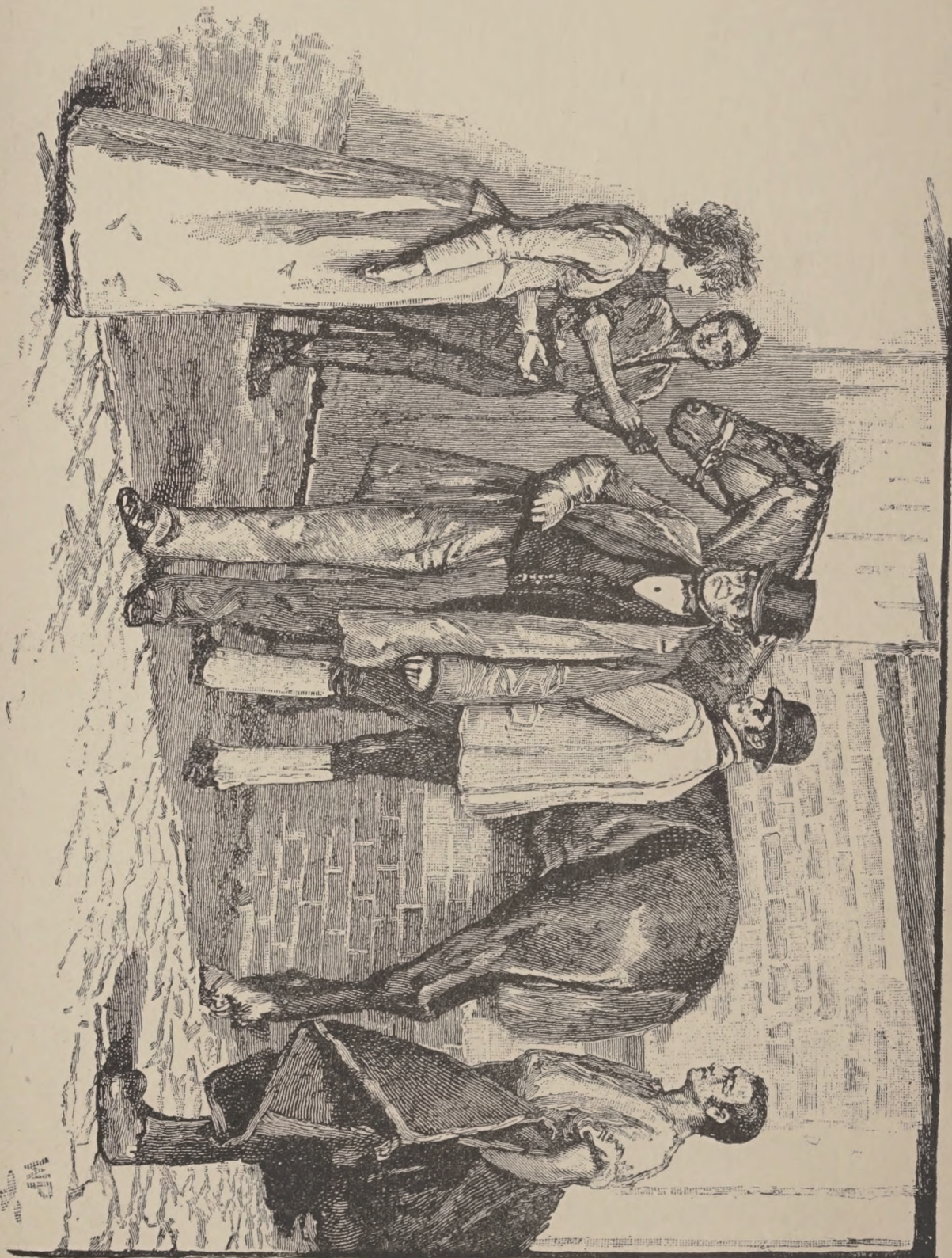
She turned her flushed, impatient face to Mrs. Ross as she spoke.

"I know there's a letter for me in the post-bag," she continued. "I'll run and ask Uncle David for the key."

"My dear Sibyl, you'll do nothing of the sort," answered Mrs. Ross. "If there is a letter for you, you will find it on your plate at lunch-time."

"I really can't wait until then, Aunt

“MR. ROSS FELL BACK A FEW STEPS IN HIS ASTONISHMENT.”



Matilda: I can't and I won't; I want my own letter, and Uncle David has no right to keep it from me!"

She was in a decided passion now, and rushed out of the sober dining room, slamming the door behind her.

Hatless she pursued her uncle into the stable-yard, and touched him on the shoulder, as he was examining a sick horse in the company of a neighboring vet.

"Uncle David, will you give me the key of the post-bag at once?"

"Eh—what? Sibyl! What are you doing here?"

Mr. Ross fell back a few steps in his astonishment, but here he was assailed by such a piteous look of entreaty in two tearful blue eyes that his heart relented a little. The vet. and the two grooms gazed at Sibyl in open-eyed admiration, and had Mr. Ross remained obdurate, it is quite possible that key might have been wrenched from him by violence.

As it was, he fumbled in his pocket and said :

“There, my dear: I suppose your aunt sent you for it,” and Sibyl danced back to the house with her prize. She secured her letter, but Mrs. Ross and Muriel were both deeply offended, and from this moment her letters were watched and noticed. Sibyl was asked who her daily correspondent was. She stoutly refused to disclose his name, and now her life from being only passively, became actively, unhappy.

Muriel, although such a placid, gentle, apparently good sort of girl, could be malicious and disagreeable in small ways. She made sly and nasty allusions to Sibyl’s daily letters, and, above all things, she taunted her when they did not come. This was the hardest thing of all to bear, for Mark’s letters were less frequent and less affectionate than of old. Sibyl felt herself sinking into a state of despair, and very soon despair made her reckless. She no longer cared to please her uncle and his wife.

One day in October, the very day after Philippa and Clarissa had taken up their

abode in the boarding house at No. 80, Sibyl awoke with a bad headache, went downstairs, to find no letter waiting for her from Mark, was reproved for her careless, untidy appearance by Mrs. Ross, was frowned at by her uncle, and taunted in an undertone by Muriel. The poor girl felt desperate, and, instead of following her cousin to the drawing room, as her usual custom was after breakfast, she ran up to her room, put on her hat, wrapped a plaid about her shoulders, and rushed out.

The moor stretched inviting and beautiful before her. She had been forbidden to go there alone, but that fact only made her more eager to tread under foot the half-withered heather and bracken. Nobody was noticing her, and she soon mounted the stile, and found herself on the breezy, open commons. The wild, untamed air soothed the fierce hunger at her heart. She ran in the teeth of the wind, loosening her plaid, and taking off her hat, so that the breezes might fan her through and through.

The breezes played rather roughly with Sibyl's bright hair. One by one the pins which confined it disappeared, and soon her long, fair tresses were flying in the wind.

She crossed one corner of the moor, but here her progress was stayed by a neatly fenced-in field, which, several years before, had been stolen from the common by a crafty farmer. There was a path leading right through this field, and a stile opening into the path. At the other side of the field the great commons stretched miles and miles away. Sibyl wondered if she could reach the spot where the sky now met the earth. Three gaunt trees stood upon the verge of the horizon. They would act as landmarks; she would make for them.

She passed through the stile, and began to run swiftly across the green field. It belonged to a certain Farmer Bates, and Sibyl did not know that his prize bull was its present lord and master. The girlish, flying figure, with golden tresses swept back by the wind and a red plaid thrown over her arm, was much too

picturesque an object not to excite his majesty's curiosity.

The animal—Jupiter by name—did not appreciate people who fled through his kingdom carrying red shawls. He lowered his head, and prepared to do battle with his adversary.

CHAPTER XXI.

SIBYL was a town-bred girl; like other inhabitants of great cities she had read of country life and country dangers. The principal country danger which met her eyes in story books was Taurus, the bull. He was represented as an awful monster, a bellowing, defiant, cruel fate from which there was no escape.

She heard a low, growling bellow now, and looking round saw Jupiter, and gave herself up for lost. She uttered a piercing shriek, and instead of attempting to run, threw herself flat down on the ground. She shut her eyes; each instant she expected the bull's horns to pierce her; she wondered how she would feel when Jupiter lifted her on those horns and flung her high in the air. Why did he not come? What was the reason?

She heard a rush, a commotion—the

clatter of sticks—the sound of blows—the mingling tones of one or two manly voices, and then she was lifted tenderly from the ground, and found her head supported on a man's shoulder.

“I trust you are not hurt?” said an anxious voice.

The voice came from the throat of Mr. Purcell, the curate. Mr. Purcell's face was darkly, deeply red, and the thickly-made hand which he had slipped round Sibyl's waist absolutely trembled.

“I trust, I hope you are not hurt,” he repeated; his agitation was intense.

“Oh, no, thank you,” said Sibyl, recovering herself. She stepped away from the encircling arm and began hastily to twist up her refractory golden tresses. One of these tresses a moment before had rested against Mr. Purcell's cheek. She knew nothing about it, but he did, and it must be confessed he liked the sensation.

“I hope you are not hurt?” repeated Mr. Purcell.

“Oh, no, not in the least. I am very much obliged to you. Did you beat the bull and make him go back?”

“Bates and I did between us. That is Bates leading the bull through that gate now. He is the farmer who owns this field, and the bull is his. You ought not to have come in; it was very dangerous. Did you not see the board up with the words printed on it ‘*Beware of the Bull*’?”

“No, I did not. There was a stile near and I came through. I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Purcell.”

“Oh, I’m only delighted. Perhaps I may be allowed to say that what I do for you I regard as a—a privilege.”

“Thank you. I will say good-by now; I want to finish my walk.”

“But are you not going home?”

“Home? No, indeed. I am going across that common until I come to the trees on the top of that hill. Good-by.” She held out her hand.

Mr. Purcell’s thick fingers touched her slim

ones; she turned on her heel and was away. The next instant Mr. Purcell heard her light footsteps flying after him.

“Oh, do you know, it is too ridiculous, but my hat is gone! I can’t find it anywhere! I thought it was hanging to my belt, but it is not.”

Mr. Purcell became immensely interested.

“Where *can* you have left it?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I walked straight from Shortlands here. I had the hat when I left the house. I took it off and fastened it to my belt. Now it is gone.”

“Shall we go back together and look for it?”

“Would *you* mind going back? I want to continue my walk. I don’t care in the least about wearing a hat. If you find it, you might hang it on one of the posts of the stile. *Will* you? I shall be so grateful.”

Sibyl scarcely waited for Mr. Purcell’s mumbled reply. In another moment she was off again. She crossed the stile at the further end, and walked on the wide expanse

of common until she was weary. She could not reach the three gnarled old trees, for, brave as she was, she did not want the fateful luncheon hour to see her place at table vacant.

She ran most of the way home. The hat was not waiting for her on the stile post, but when she reached her own room she saw it lying calmly on her bed. She scarcely gave the circumstance a thought at the time, but when she went down to lunch it occurred to her as the possible reason why her aunt, uncle, and cousin looked so black.

Mr. Purcell was also at the table. He looked excessively red and awkward, and never glanced at Sibyl. His place was laid at the same side with Sibyl, but very far away from her. He was near Mrs. Ross, so near that he almost looked as if he were sitting in her pocket. He was considered by the parish and neighborhood generally as Mrs. Ross's own special curate, and she had the appearance now of a dragon guarding him from some deadly peril.

When lunch was over, Sibyl was requested by her uncle and aunt to remain behind. Muriel and the curate meekly left the room in company. When they disappeared, Mrs. Ross went and shut the dining room door. Then she returned and faced the young girl.

"Sibyl," she said, "your uncle and I are deeply pained. You are a disobedient, designing, forward girl. You went on the common when you were strictly forbidden to do so, and, not contented with this gross disobedience, you tried to inveigle poor Mr. Purcell into your wiles. Your uncle met him absolutely carrying your hat! He said, poor young man, that he did so by your express instructions. Sibyl, you are a forward coquette. I am ashamed of you. You are no fit companion for Muriel. Go to your room and stay there, until your uncle and I decide what is best to be done with you. Go at once, my dear, and now, not a word."

"I don't want to say a word," retorted Sibyl. Her eyes flashed; she banged herself out of the room.

"She is a pretty creature," said David Ross to his wife. "Not that it makes any difference in the sin, but I should not be surprised if Purcell *liked* holding her hat."

"David!" said Mrs. Ross. "I am ashamed of you even insinuating such thoughts. Samuel Purcell is a God-fearing and guileless man."

She left the room, and Mr. Ross retired to his study.

Upstairs Sibyl was very busy.

"This decides it," she murmured to herself. "Even Mark won't keep me where I'm not wanted. Back I go to dear No. 80 this very night. Oh, another week of this awful life would have put me in a mad-house! Fancy, I being accused of flirting with Mr. Purcell!"

She ran nervously about. Her trunks were dragged forward, her possessions ruthlessly thrust into them. In a short time the drawers and the wardrobe were emptied. The ugly room looked bare and desolate, for Sibyl's two large trunks were full. She locked them carefully, strapped them with her own ener-

getic hands, turned and re-directed the labels, and then sitting down on the window-ledge, opened her purse and counted its contents. These were slender, but she had enough to pay for a third-class fare to Euston. She would go—she would go that very night; her trunks might be sent after her. She would walk to the station.

She scribbled a little note and left it on her dressing table. It was a rather impertinent little note, for Sibyl's feelings were sorely outraged just then. She put on the hat, which the curate's fingers had defiled, and waited until Mrs. Ross, Muriel, and Mr. Purcell went out for their drive. She sat well up on the window ledge, and watched the brougham drive swiftly round the carriage sweep. Mr. Purcell looked very uncomfortable on the little back seat, facing Mrs. Ross and Muriel; his big knees were up nearly to his chin; he was not talking, but Sibyl saw he was being talked *to* and *at* with vivacity.

The carriage disappeared, and Sibyl slipped softly downstairs. She let herself out at the

side door, saw to her relief that the brougham was bowling away in the opposite direction, and then set out at a brisk pace up and down the dusty hills which led from Shortlands to the little wayside station.

No one stopped her on the road. She waited some time at the station, but at last a train did come up. She entered a third-class compartment, and after what seemed like the lapse of ages found herself once more at Euston Station.

CHAPTER XXII.

PHILIPPA and Clarissa found the "good time" at the boarding house, which followed late dinner, a very excellent time indeed. These were the couple of hours in the day allotted to songs and innocent mirth-making. The girls could ask their young men friends to visit them then, and the young men were very glad to come.

Philippa was the sort of girl to enter warmly into Miss Power's scheme. Her voice and Clarissa's were decided acquisitions to the music, and the new girls, notwithstanding their serge dresses, bade fair to become some of the most popular of the party.

This happened the first night. The second night the fun and frolic and jovialty were even greater than the first. Miss Danby and Miss Marmaduke might have lived all their lives at No. 80, so at home were they with

the ways of the house and the manners of its inhabitants. They had provided themselves with tea-gowns—cheap tea-gowns, but pretty. Clarissa's was of a soft, pearly shade of blue ; Philippa's was white.

The weather was too cold now for the balcony windows to be open, but the light from the gay drawing room flittered out through the crevices of the blinds, and hailed with a warm glow of welcome a travel-stained girl, who, about nine o'clock this evening, drove up to the door.

She ran up the steps, and gave the bell a loud, familiar peal. A strange servant opened the door to her.

"Is Miss Ross in?" asked Sibyl. "You need not say I've come. I'd rather run up to my room, and make myself tidy first."

The servant looked bewildered.

"But, if you please, miss, the house is quite full."

"Oh, thank you; perhaps it is to others, but not to me. I am Sibyl Ross, one of the young ladies. Don't tell anyone I've come,

please. I'll go to Kitty's room ; I know the way."

"They are all in the drawing room now, miss. Shall I take you to Miss Kitty's room, Miss—Miss Sibyl?"

The maid had heard of Sibyl ; she had also seen her photograph occupying a place of honor in most rooms in the house. This young country maid was of a romantic turn. She felt inclined to worship Sibyl's dancing eyes and piquant face, and would have done anything in her power to aid her.

"If you come softly this way, Miss Sibyl, no one will hear us."

She took Sibyl to Kitty's new room, provided her with hot water, turned up the gas, and left her. Sibyl danced about. She was in an ecstasy at being home again ; the idea of being kissed in a moment or two by Maggie, Kitty, and Betty was bliss to her hungry heart.

Kitty's garments very nearly fitted Sibyl. She ruthlessly pulled out of its cupboard Kitty's very choicest evening dress, and

slipped it on. The dress was gray, but of so pale a shade that it looked almost white. Sibyl fastened a silver girdle round her waist, shook out her radiant hair, pinned it up more untidily than it had ever been pinned before, and then half-laughing, half-defiant, her eyes brimful of mirth, and yet with tears not very far off, her cheeks flushed with the bloom of the deepest rose, she stepped along the corridor, threw open the drawing-room door, and came in.

They were all standing round the piano when she entered, and a wave of sweet melody, and words she had heard before rushed to meet her.

With the sunshine and the swallows and the flowers
She is coming, my belovèd, o'er the sea,
And I sit alone and count the weary hours
Till she cometh in her beauty back to me !
And my heart will not be quiet
But in a purple riot
Keeps ever beating—
At the thought of that sweet meeting,
As she cometh, my beloved, home to me.

The crowd was so great round the piano

that at first the slim figure, who softly, all smiles and blushes, walked up the room, was not noticed.

The song came to an end; there was an eager chorus of applause, girls and young men divided to right and left, and Sibyl saw a girl as young as herself and nearly as pretty seated at the piano, and playing the finale to her gay accompaniment.

A man was bending over the girl, a man with an upright and graceful figure, and a smooth, dark head. It was from the lips of this man that the glad, passionate words of welcome had floated down to Sibyl.

She could not help giving a little cry. She found it impossible to remember anyone else in the drawing room: Maggie, Kitty, Betty, even, were forgotten. She rushed to the piano, said "Mark!" and held out her two hands.

For an instant Mark Danby wavered: Sibyl might be an apparition, so sudden was her appearance. Then he looked into her eyes, and the love which was the truest thing

about him mastered all other feelings. He stooped down, and kissed Sibyl on her lips before everyone in the room.

A lover's kiss given in public generally causes some consternation. The girls who were boarding in the house turned away and took up something to do, and tried to believe they had seen nothing. The young men began to wonder if they ought to go. Clarissa turned white, and looked at Philippa; Philippa's eyes almost blazed. She took Clarissa's hand and led her across the drawing room.

"Come," she said, "let us sit down in this corner, and rest until we recover ourselves. I'm stunned; aren't you?"

"I don't know," replied Clarissa, in a dreary voice. The color did not return to her cheeks.

"Clari, dear Clari, *don't* tell me that you care."

"Of course I don't, Philippa, only it's sudden, isn't it?"

"I don't suppose it's sudden at all. Kitty didn't look the least astonished, and I saw Betty's eyes dance. Look here, Clari, shall we slip out of the house, and go over and see Jessica. She'll tell us all about this; she'll let us know what it means."

"Very well," said Clarissa. The girls stole upstairs, put on their waterproof cloaks, and let themselves out into the square.

As they were walking across it, Clarissa said, not aloud, but in very strong, forcible language to her own heart:

"Now you're not going to be silly about this. You never were, you know, one scrap in love with Mark. Of course, you could not have been in love with him."

But the refrain of the song she had just been listening to came back to her, and that refrain, notwithstanding her bravery, made her feel a little sick.

Miss Power was at home, and in a moment the two girls found themselves in her cozy drawing-room. Clarissa sank down into the

first chair, and remained silent. Philippa knelt by Jessica's side and poured out her story.

"We made Mark come up to-night," said Philippa, "we made an appointment to meet him at the Grove, and then we got him to promise to come. At first he did not seem to like it very much, but then he gave way, and said he would come. Kitty and Betty and Maggie took his coming as a matter of course. After dinner we had what Betty calls our good time. It was a very good time indeed to-night. We all felt music-mad. I wonder you did not hear the noise we made across the Square."

"Won't Clarissa come nearer the fire?" suddenly interrupted Miss Power. "You look quite cold and white, my love. Here is a cozy little chair for you; do take it."

"Oh, I'm not a bit cold," said Clarissa, jumping up. She took the fresh seat, however, and tried to toast her white cheeks at the fire.

"Now Philippa, go on," said Miss Power.

“We sang glees, and quartettes, and trios until we were tired,” proceeded Philippa. “Then Clarissa sat down and played an accompaniment for Mark, and Mark sang alone. You know what a caressing voice Mark has, Jessica?”

“No, my love, I can’t say I do.”

“Well, he has. When he sings I often shut my eyes, and say to myself, ‘Now, Marky, suppose you were *not* my brother!’”

Clarissa moved restlessly at the fire.

“Well, Mark does sing very well,” proceeded Philippa, resuming her matter-of-fact tone, “and the song he sang to-night was about his love coming back to him, and he really *did* sing it as if he were very much in love. He had just finished the words, and there was a little pause in the room, when suddenly a girl we had never seen before, a very, very pretty girl, rushed into our midst, and took hold of Mark’s two hands, and looked into his face with the very sweetest, loveliest light in her own, and said ‘Mark!’—and, Jessica, Mark stooped down, and

kissed the girl on her lips ! Yes, he did, before everyone ! Clarissa and I have come over, Jessica, to ask what it all means."

"Why, my dear Philippa," replied Miss Power, "it's quite plain what it all means. Little Nineteen-year-old has come back."

"Good gracious ! Who in the world is Little Nineteen-year-old ?"

"Darling little Sibyl, the youngest sister, the prettiest of them all, and one of the wisest, too, with the exception of one nonsensical idea of hers."

"Well, of course I'm not acquainted with the Ross family intimately, so I cannot be supposed to know their idiosyncrasies," answered Philippa, somewhat haughtily. "But I cannot see why 'darling little Sibyl' should rush up to Mark and kiss him."

"My dear, he kissed her."

"Well, allow herself to be kissed by him ; it's all the same."

"Wouldn't you kiss your betrothed, if you met him suddenly, Philippa ? Ay, and

forget all the world besides when you looked into his face ? ”

“ Is Sibyl engaged to Mark, then ? ”

“ Of course she is—she has been engaged to him for the last two months.”

“ Then why don't we know ? Why is my mother kept in ignorance ? Why am I allowed to remain in the dark ? ”

“ My dear Philippa, Mark himself must answer those questions.”

“ He shall, and to-night, too,” replied Philippa, rising to her feet. “ I think we have been treated shamefully. Do you think we would have come to stay at that house if we had known that anything of that sort was going on ? Jessica, I wonder you did not tell us.”

“ My dear, how could I possibly tell you did not know ? But as we are speaking of the matter now, I may as well own I never did approve of the match.”

“ Oh, you don't think her good enough for Mark ? Well, no wonder.”

“On the contrary, I don’t think Mark half good enough for her.”

Both the girls said “Oh !” this time, and Clarissa sprang to her feet.

“Had we not better go back to No. 80 now, Philippa ?” she said.

“Yes, we’ll go,” said Philippa. “Good-night, Jessica ; I’m sorry you did not give us a hint ; for as you know Mark so well, and think so little of him, you might have guessed he would try to deceive us.”

Miss Power rose, and put her two hands on Philippa’s shoulders.

“You are angry now, dear,” she said. “And now I must admit you have much reason to be angry. When you offered to come to No. 80, I thought it very probable that you knew nothing of Mark’s engagement, and I must own that I felt a sense of satisfaction in thinking that the truth would probably reach your ears while you stayed there. It was not my place to reveal your brother’s secrets, but now that he has let them out himself, you can say anything you please to

him. You are not likely to part him from Sibyl, however, and there are many reasons which make me regret that your powers are so limited. Good-night, dear. Come and see me in the morning if you like, and if I *can* do anything to help you to lay the switch about Mark's shoulders, I shall be more than happy. Good-night, Clarissa."

CHAPTER XXIII.

NOTWITHSTANDING her agitation and anger, Philippa slept soundly all through that night. Clarissa was the one who stayed awake. Sleep fled from her wide-open eyes, and thoughts, busy and anxious, crowded into her active brain.

Clarissa was the petted heiress, the darling of her home and neighborhood, an acknowledged beauty, too. Clarissa possessed a triple gift—birth, beauty, fortune—surely everything she wished for could be hers.

Everything she desired had up to the present come at her bidding. Now, for the first time in her whole life, she was conscious of having received a direct slap in the face. She received this blow when Mark took Sibyl's hands and kissed her.

Clarissa remained for nearly half the night struggling with her own mortified feelings.

She had by no means made up her mind whether she would marry Mark, but for over a year now she had been quite sure, quite absolutely positive, that Mark would wish to marry her. She thought that in all the world she was the girl who stood first in his affections. She was not violently in love with him, but his attentions gave her pleasure, his words interested her, the fervent glance he favored her with now and then caused her heart to beat agreeably—she knew, as well as he did, that he had only to say the word to arouse deeper and stronger feelings within her.

Now that word would never be spoken. Clarissa lay in her humble little bed under the eaves in the attic bedroom and wept. Her tears flowed noiselessly and easily. Had she felt more deeply she might not have cried at all.

All during the early part of the night, Clarissa thought of the slap she had received, but toward morning her meditations took another turn. She became anxious that Mark

should not have that switch laid across his shoulders.

Philippa had spoken angrily of a rod lying up in pickle for her darling Marky, but Clarissa wished the rod to be taken out of pickle. Then, from tender thoughts of Mark, who had all her life been her favorite cousin, this kind-hearted creature began to think of the girl who had rushed into the midst of the charmed circle last night. The girl's face was pretty, pretty and yet worn, with that pathetic look of wear which only adds to the beauty of very early youth. The eyes that gazed into Mark's were no strangers to tears, the full, rosy lips appealed both to pity and to love.

Clarissa was attracted by this girl, and in the morning she got up, pale and heavy-eyed, it's true, but with her wise and kind little brain teeming with thoughts.

"We'll go away to-day," said Philippa, as she took turns with her cousin to arrange her hair before the small looking-glass.

“Yes,” answered Clarissa, “but I must see Sibyl first.”

“What—‘the darling little Sibyl’? Do you want to see more of her? I must own it is not what I do.”

“I should like to see her again,” answered Clarissa, in a meek voice.

Philippa looked hard at her cousin’s back; she was not permitted to view her face; and a few seconds afterward the two girls went downstairs together.

The greater number of the girls who boarded in the house had left the breakfast room when Philippa and Clarissa entered. These girls had gone about their daily avocations, some to Schools of Art, some to the Musical Academies, some to teach, some to be taught. The Rosses, however, were still in the breakfast room, and Maggie smiled at her guests, and made them welcome when they tripped in.

Philippa responded coldly to Maggie’s greeting. She sat down at the breakfast

table, helped herself to cold toast, and steadily ignored the delicious hot muffins which Kitty was pushing in her direction. Sibyl was in the room; she had borrowed another of Kitty's frocks, and Clarissa saw that her fresh, softly-rounded face looked even prettier by daylight than candle-light.

Sibyl's eyes were brimful of mirth and happiness, and Clarissa noticed that her sisters could not make enough of her.

When the meal was over Philippa rose and went up to speak to Maggie. Now was Clarissa's chance. She was a remarkably gentle girl, and had seldom taken any initiative step before. The color flushed all over her face as she stepped up to Sibyl and, taking her hand, said in a low, sweet voice:

"I heard last night that you were engaged to Mark. Let me congratulate you."

Sibyl flushed more brightly even than Clarissa.

"Are you Mark's cousin, Clarissa?" she whispered back.

"Yes, and his sister Philippa is here. She

is talking to your sister; come and speak to her with me."

Clarissa took Sibyl's hand.

"Philippa," she said, touching her tall cousin with a slight, half-beseeching movement, "this is Sibyl."

"How do you do?" said Philippa.

She took Sibyl's hand, and held it in a light, limp fashion, then dropping it, she turned to Maggie.

"My cousin and I must leave to-day. Will you kindly have our accounts sent to our room." Then, without again glancing at Sibyl, she left the dining room.

A few moments later Clarissa rushed into the attic bedroom.

"Philippa," she said, "I am going to stay at 80 Rosemary Gardens for the present. I have spoken to Maggie. I don't want to go back to Ashton Manor to-day."

"Now, Clarissa, what is the meaning of this?"

"I am going to see if I cannot help Sibyl and Mark," continued Clarissa, in a steady

voice. "Sibyl is a very pretty girl, and very nice, and she loves Mark with all her heart, and I should like them to be married. You can go back, Philippa, and scold Mark, but I shall stay here and help him."

Philippa looked hard at her cousin.

"Clarissa," she said, after a long pause, "you are an angel, but the aggravation of your goodness nearly maddens me. Why can't you be ordinary and vindictive in this matter?"

"What have I to be vindictive about?" asked Clarissa, rearing her slight little neck in a very royal style.

"Oh, well, nothing, I suppose. Stay if you want to, Clarissa. I assure you, you'll be the reverse of a comfort to me at Ashton Manor at present. I feel diabolical, and you are angelic, and the farther apart we are for the time being, the better. A nice, pleasant, cheerful period I am likely to have with my beloved mother and Mark for the next few days. One tugging me one way, and the other the other—and all on account of that

‘darling little Sibyl.’ There, I hate her; I can’t help it.”

Philippa left by an early train. As soon as ever she was gone, Clarissa sat down in her attic bedroom, and wrote a letter to her father:

80 ROSEMARY GARDENS,
October 24.

DEAREST FATHER: I am in the most delightful boarding house in the world. It is kept by three girls, real ladies. They won’t admit gentlemen boarders, or you ought to come and never leave it. Oh, it’s quite an heavenly place. I came here two days ago, with Philippa Danby. Mark came to see us last night, and what do you think? We had a delicious little *dénoûment* in the drawing-room. Mark was singing a love song. You know what a *nice* voice he has, and he sang about hearts, and riots, and meetings, and all that sort of thing, you know! Of course, laugh at them, but I expect you liked them well enough when mother was a young girl!

Well, he had scarcely finished singing, when in rushed his lady-love. She was in silvery gray, and her face was just lovely. She took his hands, and he looked at her, and then *he kissed her before a whole roomful of people!* Mark has been engaged for two months to Sibyl Ross, the sister of the girls who keep the boarding house. Mark would not allow her to help to keep it, but he sent her away to a dreadful old uncle, who kept a bull and a curate, and who

stole her hats. I can't quite make out that part of the story, but anyhow Sibyl could not bear either the uncle or the curate, and so she ran away, and came back to London. Father, she is just the wife for Mark, and he is so fond of her. Philippa and Aunt Jane, I know, will oppose the match, but you have no silly, false pride. Father, try and get Mark something to do.

Your loving daughter,

CLARISSA.

P. S.—I shall be here for the next few days, so you can write or wire about Mark's appointment when you get this.

Clarissa's father was at Brighton now, and she calculated he would receive this important letter by the evening post, at the latest. If he wrote by return, which she hoped he might do, she ought to get a letter by the following morning.

None came, which disappointed her, but immediately after breakfast a yellow envelope was thrust into her hand.

"The answer is prepaid, miss," said the maid, standing before Clarissa.

She tore the yellow envelope open, with trembling fingers.

“Will Uncle Joe’s agency do?” was scrawled on pink paper inside.

Clarissa, with trembling fingers, wrote one word on the prepaid reply: “Splendid!”

CHAPTER XXIV.

CLARISSA's father sent off his telegram, then he came and sat with his wife in her boudoir.

"My dear," he said, after a time, "I don't think anything has ever given me more relief than that letter of Clari's last night. I may as well confess to you that I lived in hourly dread of the post bringing me the child's announcement that she was herself engaged to Mark Danby."

"And, my love," responded Mrs. Marmaduke, raising her handsome, somewhat inert, face, "had Clarissa so written we would have been obliged to say 'Yes'; for, you know, we always made up our minds that we would never oppose Clari's and Vi's love affairs."

"Well, thank Heaven, the danger is past," said Mr. Marmaduke. "The dear girl had evidently only the most cousinly regard for

Mark, and now, seeing that he is my own nephew, I am bound to help him all I can. I can't say that he takes my fancy, but he wouldn't be a bad sort of fellow if his mother could only make up her mind to leave him alone. What do you say, Henrietta, my dear? Shall I go to town by the next train and see Clari?"

"Yes, and for goodness' sake bring the child home, George; don't leave her in that queer boarding house by herself."

Mr. Marmaduke laughed.

"I can't promise anything," he said. "I'll see how things really appear. The child speaks well of the place, and she has a wise little head on her pretty shoulders."

Mr. Marmaduke arrived at No. 80 Rosemary Gardens that evening, in time to enjoy a very sociable cup of afternoon tea. Three of the Ross girls were present. One poured out his tea, another helped him to cream and sugar (he took both), and a third supplied him with brown bread and butter cut to perfection.

He thought the three Misses Ross quite lady-like young women, and invited Kitty down to Brighton to stay with Clarissa and Violet.

After the meal was over, this good man had first an interview with Clarissa, then with Mark, and, lastly, Sibyl was introduced to him. It was in Sibyl's presence that the Hon. George Marmaduke made Mark Danby a substantial offer.

"You want to marry this young woman," he said, looking straight into his nephew's eyes.

Mark colored all over his dark face.

"Yes, sir, I do, if she will have me," he said.

"And you want to marry my nephew?" continued Mr. Marmaduke, nodding to Sibyl.

"Yes, sir, if he will have me," she answered. Then she took Clarissa's hand and squeezed it hard.

"And what income have you to marry on?" continued Mr. Marmaduke, looking again at Mark.

"I'm afraid I have not any, sir."

“H’m. You doubtless have an equivalent to no income—debts?”

“I do owe some money, Uncle George.”

“I might have known that. How much?”

“Three hundred pounds would cover everything, sir.”

“On your honor?”

“Yes, sir; on my honor.”

Mr. Marmaduke said “H’m!” twice, very loudly.

“You love this girl, nephew?” he said then.

“Yes,” answered Mark.

His “Yes” was so full of meaning, that Sibyl quite hurt Clarissa’s hand the way she squeezed it.

“You are reading for the law?” continued Mr. Marmaduke.

“Yes.”

“Well, now, I’ll tell you what it is. If I were you I’d give up the law, or at any rate the special branch you are preparing for. I doubt your ever doing much at the bar. Anyhow, it would be weary waiting to marry on what you made, and somehow Clarissa and I

don't want this young girl to have to wait an interminable time. I tell you what I'll do for you, Mark. I'll pay your debts and start you clear, and I'll give you a letter to my wife's brother, Joseph Symington. He wants a likely young fellow like yourself to act as agent to his property in Cornwall. You would have, of course, to live there, and would have a small income to start with—say, four hundred a year. Would this be agreeable to you?"

Mark's face had turned very white. He looked at Sibyl, at Clarissa, at his uncle.

"I don't deserve it," he murmured.

Sibyl rushed forward and clasped Mr. Marmaduke's hand.

"I don't know how to thank you," her eyes said. Her trembling lips tried to say the words, but they failed.

"Well, it's all settled, my dear," said Mr. Marmaduke; "and as you'll be my niece soon, you may as well give me a kiss."

At this moment the important conference was interrupted by a slight, but imperative,

tap at the room door. Before Sibyl had time to go and open it Miss Power walked in.

“How do you do?” she said, shaking hands with Mr. Marmaduke. Then she added, before anyone had time to utter a word: “I know what you are all talking about. You, Clarissa, and you, George, are trying to smooth matters for your cousin and nephew, Mark Danby. He has set his heart on marrying Sibyl Ross. He is remarkably lucky in his choice, and as his relatives, it is undoubtedly your bounden duty to prevent his losing the luck which he will certainly have when he unites himself to this young girl. Come here, Sibyl dear; give me your hand. The Bible says,” continued Miss Power, “that the price of a good wife is above rubies. When Mark marries Sibyl he will have united himself to a lady, and a beautiful as well as a good girl. What can any man want more? Mark, I wish you luck. Shake hands.”

Miss Power wrung Mark's hands in a very

heartly manner. Then she turned to Sibyl and kissed her.

“My love,” she said, “You are motherless, and on this occasion, I mean to act as a mother to you. You shall be married from my house, and I will give you your trousseau. In addition to this, I mean to make you a present of two thousand pounds. This is by no means a fortune, Sibyl, but it will give you a little certain income quite independent of your husband—for I warrant you, my dear, I shall see it securely settled on you. Now you four good people can go on with your conference. I have said my say, and I must go.”

.

“I might have guessed it,” said Philippa. “I was a great fool to be so taken unawares. I might have known that Marky wouldn’t hide letters morning after morning for nothing. Oh, my dear mamsey, for goodness’ sake don’t begin to cry again! My nerves really won’t stand it.”

Lady Jane took a limp handkerchief out of

her pocket. This she applied pathetically to her eyes. Then she turned and plaintively examined the contents of a silver salver near her side.

"Four letters have arrived by the afternoon's post, Philippa," she said; "here they are. I haven't opened one of them, for I know they are all about that detestable girl."

"But they must be read," said Philippa, in her practical voice. "Let me look at them. This one is from Mark. Shall I read it to you, mother?"

"If you like, my love."

"Dear me, I don't like it a bit, mams, but what can't be cured now, then—here goes——" Philippa tore open the letter, and read the following words aloud:

"80 ROSEMARY GARDENS,
October 26.

"MY DEAR MOTHER: I am the happiest fellow in the world. Uncle George has behaved like a real old Briton. He is setting me on my feet, for I will confess that I did owe for one or two little matters——"

“Good gracious ! The wicked, ungrateful boy was in debt, as well as everything else !” screamed Lady Jane.

“Now, mother, *do* let me go on reading :

“——Uncle George has set me on my feet, and he has got me the Symington agency, which you know I was always dying for. Sibyl and I are to be married as soon as possible. I know you will love her when you see her—I long to introduce her to you——”

“H’m—h’m. I needn’t read the rest,” continued Philippa, “it’s rhapsody.”

She took up another of the letters.

“This is from Jessica Power,” she said. She proceeded to open the envelope :

80 ROSEMARY GARDENS,
O tobe 26.

MY DEAR JANE : I congratulate you. Your son has secured a charming girl for his wife. She is to be married from my house, and I am going to settle two thousand pounds strictly on herself.

Yours sincerely,

JESSICA POWER.

“This,” continued Philippa, “is from Clarissa ; I know the kind of sentiments she is

likely to put into a letter at present, so I decline to read it until I feel less aggravated. And this is from Uncle George. Now then, worthy uncle, what are your remarks on the situation?"

The crackling of paper was heard for an instant, then a loud exclamation from Philippa.

"Oh, good gracious, mamsey, do hearken to this!"

"80 ROSEMARY GARDENS.

[How I hate the sound of that address!]

"MY DEAR SISTER: Mark is a lucky fellow. He has secured a charming girl for his wife—a modest, ladylike, nice creature. This is just a line to tell you that Clarissa and I, and Mark and Sibyl, are all coming down to dine with you this evening. We shall arrive by the 5:40 train.

"Your affectionate brother,

"GEORGE MARMADUKE."

"My dear Philippa!" exclaimed Lady Jane, "there isn't a thing in the house for dinner!"

"My dear mamsey, for goodness' sake, don't lose your head. I'll fly round to the butchers, and the fishmongers, and the green-

grocers, and to Johnson, the grocer, and order in supplies."

"Yes, oh, yes—but Philippa——"

"Yes, yes, mamsey, but hadn't you better see the cook?"

"I will, I will, but Philippa, one moment——"

"*What* is it? I really must fly round to——"

"Oh, *won't* you let me speak? How are we to receive her?"

"Who? There are four people coming."

"Philippa, you are enough to distract anyone. How am I to receive Sibyl—my new daughter that is to be?"

"Put your arms round her, and call her *that*, motherly, and all will be well. As to me, I'll just say: 'Here you are, darling little Sibyl!' Oh, of course, we must make the best of it. Now, if there's going to be any dinner, I must fly!"

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